ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE

BY LEO EDWARDS

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SECRET SERVICE

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

GROSSET & DUNLAP
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Made in the United States of America

To
DOROTHY
and her daddy
E. L. M.

OUR CHATTER BOX

IT will be a surprise (I trust it will be a pleasant surprise) to many of the young readers of my books (and this is Leo Edwards speaking) to find a Chatter Box in an Andy Blake book. For it was stated that the Chatter Box was to be an exclusive feature of the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books.

But countless Jerry Todd fans have told me that they have extended their interest to Andy Blake; and I get *so* many corking good letters from boys that I simply must find room for them.

In our initial Chatter Box I explained the purpose of this department. To be composed chiefly of contributions from my many hundreds of boy pals (and I always feel that every boy who reads one of my books is my pal for life), it will give us a chance to sort of get together in a huge friendly circle, first one of us "speaking his piece," and then another.

So, if you have something short and snappy to submit—something that you feel will interest other boys—send it in. By reading the three Chatter Boxes published to date, in "Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem," "Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant" and "Andy Blake's Secret Service," you'll get a comprehensive idea of the kind of stuff that we can use. There should be no disappointment on your part, however, if you submit stuff that we cannot use. Getting several thousand letters yearly from boys, you can understand how impossible it would be for me to reproduce all of these letters. I pick out those that contain something of general interest. Letters praising my books are pleasing; but these will be given small space in our "letter" column. We want snappy, newsy stuff.

WHITE BATS

A WHITE BAT!

It was worth seeing, Robert Adcock told me. So, like a big boob, I let this young Florida cracker drag me into the country—where I was shown a white brick in a cage.

A brickbat!

Robert is representative of the many fine boys that I have met in St. Petersburg, Florida, where Mrs. Edwards and I are spending the winter. They're all real he-boys. And I wouldn't trade their friendship for a chance to be President.

Ralph Clark is another St. Petersburg boy whom I particularly like. He's planning to work his way through college; so you can see what kind of a guy *he* is.

PICTURES

FIRST on the list (and this is a partial list of the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans who sent me pictures of themselves during the past few weeks)

comes Jack Rudolph of Lynbrook, N. J. As a Freckled Goldfish, Jack is fulfilling one of the rules of the order—he is grinning from ear to ear.

Next comes Bob James of Valparaiso, Ind., who sends me a peachy picture of himself (he's ten years old) and his dog. And Bob asks me what so many, many boys have asked me—*is* there such a town as Tutter?—and will I please include him in Jerry's gang and write a story about him.

Here, too, right under my very appreciative eyes (I almost said my nose!) is a snapshot of Caleb F. Enix, Jr., Chicago, Ill., also a picture of his sister, Mary Rose, still another of Rose herself and a fourth of Caleb, Rose, Robert Donahue and Joan Walkowiak dressed up like pirates. Caleb's daddy is editor of the Chicago *Daily News*. Authors are lucky; and here's the luck in this case: Both Caleb and Rose want me to visit them at their summer home near White Pigeon, Mich. How I would love to! And who knows but what these Jerry Todd fans will come to see me in Wisconsin?

Seldom do I receive a picture of a finer looking boy than this picture in front of me of George Downs of San Antonio, Texas. Many thanks, old pal, both for the picture (how I'd love to meet you!) and the pleasing words about Poppy and Jerry.

Also I have here a picture of Leon E. Bowes of Providence, R. I. He was twelve when this picture was taken, and so far as I can see to the contrary he has arms, legs, a nose and everything else that an up-and-coming boy should have. If you were to ask me I would say that Leon is a very good-looking boy. And now that he has sent me his picture we are pals for life.

Kenneth Koupp of Fremont, Ohio, is another likely looking young American who honors me with one of his pictures. As bright as a dollar!

And from Fred Walker, Jr., of Los Angeles, Calif., comes a picture of a different sort—a picture of a classy boat and outboard motor, a present, Fred tells me, from his dad. Bully for you, Dad. Every boy near a stream or lake ought to have a boat and an outboard motor. Outboard motoring is my chief hobby, as many boys will suspect who read the "Tittering Totem" book.

LETTERS

"AS a Boy Scout," writes Walter von Lindenberg, Baltimore, Md., "I would like to start up a correspondence with the Boy Scout in your family to whom (with his chums) the book entitled 'Jerry Todd, Pirate' is dedicated. I am sixteen years old and have been in scouting three years. Our troop has a scout library and I am librarian and Troop Scribe. As soon as the current issue of *Scout Life* (our official troop paper) is out I'll send you a copy."

Well, Walt, write a letter to Beanie Lee, Cambridge, Wisc. He's the Boy Scout in our family. I imagine he'll tell you all about his scout work.

"I have started a Freckled Goldfish club," writes Francis Smith, Chambersburg, Penna., "and would like a letter from

you giving advice on how to manage such a club. We have a room in the attic of my house which has been converted into a club room. In our small library we have every book you have written. If possible, we would like to have your picture to put on the wall. Your letter will be kept in our club treasure chest. I am launching a campaign for new members in our school and soon you will have a flock of letters arriving at your residence."

Bully for you, Francis! Sorry I hadn't a "pitcher" to send you. But you got your personal letter —hey? Here are the names of Francis' chums who signed the letter: Maurice Brown, Clarence Baer, Paul Detrich, George Knoll, Herbert Stoner, Clarence Levy, Reynolds Nichols, Paul Kraiss and Jerry Miller.

William Gracy, Wilkensburg, Penna., tells me in a very interesting letter that he is writing a book entitled "The Secret of the Old Mill"—and the story, I understand, is about Skippy Spencer. "I've written only a couple of chapters," advises Bill. "When I have finished the story I'll send it to you for your comments."

Well, good luck, Bill. I get so many letters from boys interested in story writing that I was tempted, in our initial Chatter Box, to give these aspiring young authors some helpful advice. At least I hope that a few of the boys who read my comments will find them helpful.

Alas, the world is to have one less doctor and one more lawyer —at least so advises Jack Davis, Utica, N. Y. "I wanted to be a lawyer or a surgeon," writes Jack. "But I changed my mind about being a surgeon when I saw an animal doctor put a dog to sleep. I've decided to be a lawyer."

"During Christmas vacation," writes Lawrence Doherty, Chicago, Ill., "the teacher in my room told each pupil to make a book report, so I wrote on 'Jerry Todd, Pirate.' Concluding the report, I told about your Freckled Goldfish club and urged the other boys to join."

Fine work, Lawrence.

And do these loyal little Jerry Todd fans ever check up on me! Wough! Clean out your ears and listen to this one: "I would like to ask you a question," writes Don Syska, Maplewood, N. J. "In your book, 'Poppy Ott's Seven-League Stilts,' you stated that Red, Scoop and Peg had gone to Red's uncle's farm; and in 'Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish' Red appears. How is it that he should come home and leave Scoop and Peg on his uncle's farm?"

You know, Don, a writer has "impressions." That is, he has a sort of layout of things in his mind, as he writes a story, but he does not put all of the stuff in his head down on paper. My "impression" in this case is that all three of the boys came home from the farm in due time; Scoop and Peg were in town at the time the "Goldfish" adventures took place, but evidently I felt that it wasn't advisable to bring them into the story. I needed Red on account of his freckles. It isn't my purpose to have all of the Tutter boys comprising Jerry's gang in all of my Poppy Ott books. In fact, Poppy Ott

rarely has an active part in the Jerry Todd stories. Hereafter, though, I expect to use Red and Rory (see "Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem") in many of the Poppy Ott books.

And here's another Jerry Todd fan who wants to know "how 'tis?" "How could (I think it was Peg) be reading the Waltzing Hen book in the Oak Island Treasure story," writes Marion Paddis, Oklahoma City, Okla., "when the latter book comes first?"

Guilty, judge! But please be merciful with the prisoner.

As a matter of fact, Marion, the "Hen" story was written first. The publishers held the manuscript for a year, until I had completed the third and fifth books of the series, at which time the third, fourth and fifth books were brought out together.

Further, Marion wants to know (like 'steen hundred other fans) if Jerry, Scoop, Peg, Red, Poppy, etc., are real boys. See my answer to that in our initial Chatter Box.

"I have never read a Poppy Ott book," writes William Paul, Brooklyn, N. Y., "but I have read some of the Jerry Todd books. I am eleven years old."

Well, Bill, I'm glad you're only eleven—I'd hate to think that you had been reading books for ten or more years without brushing up against Poppy Ott. For the boy who hasn't made a story-book pal of Poppy sure is missing a lot of fun. Any boy who likes the Jerry Todd books is bound to like the Poppy Ott series. The books are written for your entertainment. So don't miss the fun they provide.

"I wish you would have Poppy Ott invent a rubber automobile, so it wouldn't hurt people who get bumped," writes William Wade, New York City, N. Y. "I just got out of the hospital for a 'slight' occurrence with one. It is my ambition to become an author when I'm older."

Poppy, do you hear what Bill says? He wants you to start an epidemic of rubber automobiles. And here's good luck to you, Bill, when you start "authoring."

And now I suppose all the cats and dogs in the country will be named Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Red Meyers, with the newspapers publishing tearful accounts of how "Jerry Todd" lost three legs in a street-car accident and also how "Poppy Ott" got his tail caught in a trap. At least we know of *one* dog named Jerry Todd.

"I have read all of the Jerry Todd and Andy Blake books," writes Robert Smith of Chicago, Ill., "and enjoyed them very much. I have a police dog and I named it Jerry Todd."

"There's a boy in our neighborhood," writes Barrett Geehan (he gives no address on his letterhead), "who never cared to read books. I told him some things that happen to Jerry Todd and his chums, and now this neighbor boy borrows books about Jerry and Poppy and enjoys them a lot. I'm eleven years old, but so big for my age that one time dad and I wore each other's shirts for a week and never knew the difference. The boys call me Tubby."

Well, Tubby, old pal, you deserve a great deal of credit—not for letting your pa wear your

shirt, but for making a book reader of your chum. For there is fine fun and lots of it in books. All boys should read good books.

"I have read all of your Jerry Todd books except 'Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave,'" writes Howard Baker of Glen Ellen, Ill. "I usually get most of my books either on my birthday or at Christmas. I find that the Oak Island Treasure story is very exciting, especially where Jerry and his friends are locked in the house and see the piano tuner trying to get the piano leg which has the money in it."

And won't Howard be pleased when he learns that "Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave" is a continuation of the Oak Island Treasure story! Then, of course, he'll want to read "Jerry Todd, Pirate," which is the third book of my "Oak Island" series.

My, how swelled-up I am. For Clinton Smullan of New York City, N. Y., writes as follows:

"I want to congratulate you, for yours are the best books in the United States, Canada, Africa, Asia, South Pole and North Pole."

"I know how Jerry Todd and his gang felt when they fitted up their old scow with a swell engine—even if it did gag and die a lot," writes Walter Abronski, Philadelphia, Penna., "for one summer, while visiting a cousin at Beach Haven, N. J., we bailed out and made use of an old square-ended rowboat that had belonged to the yacht club. A king couldn't have had a better time in a swell motor boat than we had in that leaky tub, for we could ride the high-and-wide waves with perfect ease."

Walt is one of the many thousands of oys who have learned that you don't have to be rich and own all those expensive things that riches provide in order to have fun. The most popular boy in our town is the owner of a rickety old Ford. His pals are crazy to ride with him . . . and almost always they have to walk home, or push. I've done both. And it was great sport. Make your own fun, boys; it's the best fun after all.

And if you doubt what I have just said, read this:

"My parents have a large and beautiful summer home at a lake in Maine," writes a boy whose name I will withhold. "I have for my own use a rowboat, a motorboat and a sailboat, all kept at my own wharf, which has on it swimming chutes, diving towers, springboards, car chutes and about everything a boy could want. But that's nothing like having real fun like Jerry Todd, and being at your liberty."

"Last June," writes Barton Bland, Bellwood, Penna., "our gang had a club in a barn down town. It was square (meaning the barn) and red, so we called it the ten-by-ten room, like in the Talking Frog book. Right above us was a smaller room that we called the small ten-by-ten room. In one corner of our club room was a table and chairs, there was a junk pile in another corner, straw in a third and steps in the fourth corner. We had a big skull and crossbones. Also we had pictures on the walls and secret places. Our laws were:

(1) No smoking.
(2) No swearing.
(3) No spitting on the floor.
(4) No telling the club's secrets.

"Our chief duty was to protect our honorary members. That is: We picked out weak, small and sick kids, made a list of their names, then we swore to stick by them in all cases. We kept their membership a secret from them. Another duty was to break up gang. like Bid Stricker's —and believe me we have plenty of them around here.

"Here's our roll-call:
Roy Becktol, Chief.
Edward Leddy, Assistant Chief.
Russel Noel, 2nd Assistant Chief.
Samuel Noel, Treasurer.
Paul Noel, Assistant Treasurer.
Barton Bland, Secretary, Chief Reporter, Scribe, etc.

"We have our meetings once a week. And in our play we take names out of your books. Roy is Peg, Sam is Scoop, I am Jerry, Ed is Red and Paul is Poppy."

"I made up a 'fish' name for myself," writes Freckled Goldfish Jerry Haxby of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "The name is Codfish, Jr. Is it all right for a Freckled Goldfish to miss Sunday school now and then; and do I have to take a bath twice a week? I grin lots of the time but not all of the time. I grow, but not very fast. I don't keep my ears very clean because I can't get behind them very well. I'll try to be good, but I won't promise. I went skiing this afternoon and took a belly-flop that knocked all the wind out of me."

Well, Jerry, I'm glad that you're trying to observe the rules of our secret lodge. Two baths a week are not too many for a Freckled Goldfish. As for getting behind your ears, trying using a stepladder; or let yourself down from the ceiling with a rope.

And here's a letter from another boy from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"I like to grin—and boy can I grin!" writes Jack Myers, with reference to the rules of our Freckled Goldfish lodge. "I've got a grin too big; but I don't seem to grow very much—I'm really short and fat. Jerry Haxby and I started a club at home called the Jack and Jerry Lodge. We meet every Saturday. I never cared for the Jerry Todd or Poppy Ott books before this year, but now I'm wild about them."

How I would like to look in on one of those weekly meetings of the Jack and Jerry Lodge—or when Mother Myers says: "Young man, remember what Mr. Edwards told you about washing your ears. March right to the bathroom."

"I am a city boy," writes Melvin Binder of Jersey City, N. J., "with a great longing to live in the country (like Jerry Todd) and go barefooted, fishing, and swimming in my birthday suit (because a fellow can swim faster that way). One day, at Eagle Beach, where we swim city fashion, my brother Harry says to me, 'Why don't you learn to swim faster?' So I says, 'All right.' So he takes me out to the channel on a raft and says, 'Dive in.' I did. But I couldn't keep up. I swallowed nearly the

whole channel. Harry had to save me."

Three cheers for Harry! And would that I could move a nice dusty country lane up in front of your door, Melvin, for going barefooted, in the way that small-town boys do, is bully good fun. I've done it, and I know.

And just to prove to you that my home town (Cambridge, Wisc.) pals can write just as funny letters as boys from other sections, here's a letter, addressed to me at St. Petersburg, from Bob Billings, one of my Wisconsin buddies.

"The other night Beanie came down to my house and we made some candy—that is, you can call it candy if you want to. Here's the recipe: 1½ cups of brown sugar, ½ cup of white sugar, ½ cup of milk, ½ cup of water. Dump it in a pan. Cook till it hardens in water. Then burn it for awhile. Then dump in a dime's worth of nut meats. Stir awhile. Then set it out to harden. When you want to eat it, take a good sharp axe—but be careful you don't break the axe. Then cut it up (not the axe, but the candy) and feed it to the alligators—if you want to kill them."

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

YEP! The little old Freckled Goldfish lodge is still doing business at the same old place. In January (1929) alone we booked more than 400 new members. Pretty good, hey?

If you are not a member of our fun lodge, the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish (which lodge was inspired by the Poppy Ott book of that title) I would like to leave the thought with you that we're anxious for you to join. The sole purpose of the lodge is to provide added fun for boys. So every Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fan ought to join.

If you are too busy to write, ask Mother or Dad to write for you. Or maybe Mother will write and surprise you with your membership card. We have a big registration book at headquarters in which are recorded the names and addresses of all members. I think you will be proud to have your name in this book, one of my choicest possessions.

Then, too, each new member receives a unique numbered membership card designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books. Containing a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish, together with our secret rules (all printed on the card), each card also bears my own personal autograph, if that is of any importance to you.

Any boy anywhere, of any age, size or color, who has a friendly feeling toward Jerry and Poppy is welcome to join. It will cost you four cents in stamps—four one-cent stamps or two two-cent stamps. One red stamp will pay the postage on your membership card; and the other red stamp will partly cover the cost of the envelope and the illustrated card.

In applying for membership please observe these simple rules:

(1) Print or write your name plainly.

(2) Supply your complete address.
(3) Give your age.
(4) Enclose two two-cent United States postage stamps—or four one-cent stamps.
(5) Address your letter to,
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

In applying for membership in our lodge, boys not infrequently make a scribble of their signatures; and then they don't like it because we misspell their names. We do the best we can. And we are very glad to issue corrected membership cards at our own expense in every case where an error is brought to our attention. But, boys, why not PRINT your name and address, if you are a poor writer? It will make it easier for us; and your card will be wholly satisfactory to you.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

DOZENS of boys have asked me if they might organize local chapters, as a part of our international Freckled Goldfish lodge. Permission was granted in all cases; but I was unfortunate in being unable to give these boys much help in the organization of such chapters.

But now we have a printed ritual, which any boy who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct the lodge meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given, word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a lodge. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps).

Address all orders to,
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

EDWARD SCHELLHAAS SAYS:

I AM sending this letter to you asking you to send me one of the membership cards of the Freckled Goldfish lodge," writes Edward Schellhaas of Albany, N. Y. "I am twelve years old. I want you to send me all of the rules and secrets.

"My aunt owns the typewriter with which I am typing this letter. I thought I would type instead of write. Even if I did write I don't think you could make out much anyway. You might think it was hen scratching. I like all of your books very much. In the book, 'Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy,' it was interesting where the boys got mixed up with the mummy. It sure was mysterious where

they heard the mummy whisper. Gee, they sure were scared. Well, to tell the truth, I was kind of scared myself, not so much when I read the book but when I went to bed at night. I dreamed that a mummy was chasing me. . . . In 'Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat' I liked it where Jerry and his chums got in that mix-up with the cats. Boy, they sure did have some trouble with those cats. I hope I never get in a mix-up like that. I like it where Jerry set that trap and got caught in it himself. And those pink pearls! Well, I was glad when that mystery was over. . . . And then the mystery of the Oak Island Treasure. I like real mystery stories with ghosts in them, where you don't find out who the ghost is until near the end of the book. I have all of the Jerry Todd books. Every time I hear about a new book coming out I don't let the dealer rest until he gets it. The first time I heard about the Freckled Goldfish lodge I didn't pay much attention to it. Then I read about it again. I then made up my mind to join and learn more about you and the books you write. Well, now to get back to where I was talking about the books. In the third book, 'Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure,' it was good where that friendly ghost came aboard and scared the Strickers away. And the fun Jerry, Scoop, Red and Peg had making ready for the show and how they later gave a show. Boy, that was a good show. And then that bug had to bite Jerry and that ended the headless act. That's what made a good end for the show. And how they later went to Oak Island and had fun burying the treasure. And the other adventures they had on the island. . . . And in the book, 'Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen,' it was good about the prowling peril and the yellow face. However, this book does not have as many mysterious adventures as some of the other books. The waltzing hen itself was good. . . . In 'Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog' it was good where the boys heard footsteps outside, yet when they went outside no one was there. And the mystery of the puzzle room; and how they climbed up the rope to the puzzle room. . . . And 'Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg!' Well, that was some egg. And the tomato fight and how the boys went back to the barn, finding that the barn was on fire. I got kind of scared when they went up in the haymow and found the blood on the floor. . . . And in 'Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave,' where Jerry got under the bed and the mysterious man and his hidden money—that was good. . . . And the adventures that the boys had with those dishes in 'Jerry Todd, Pirate,' and how they were captured by Bid Stricker and his gang and how, later, Jerry and his gang dressed up like pirates and had that rotten-egg fight—I like that. . . . And I like the Poppy Ott and the Andy Blake books. Now I'm eagerly waiting for the Bob-Tailed Elephant book. Please write and tell me what new books are coming out after the Bob-Tailed Elephant."

LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' Published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog
Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave
Jerry Todd, Pirate
Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot
Poppy Ott's Seven-League Stilts
Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail
Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles
Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish
Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem

THE ANDY BLAKE SERIES

Andy Blake
Andy Blake's Comet Coaster
Andy Blake's Secret Service

The following titles are in preparation:

Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief
Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake
Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold

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ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE

CHAPTER I

ANDY'S CONTINUED SUCCESS

ANDY BLAKE was in a particularly jubilant mood.

For earlier in the day, as sales promotion manager of the Boy Products Company, manufacturers of coaster wagons and similar juvenile products, it had been his privilege to turn over to the order department one of the largest coaster-wagon contracts yet received by the growing young business.

And now it was swimming time!

Merchandising was Andy's chosen work. Big indeed had been his youthful dreams. And at times, as he looked back, it seemed almost unbelievable to him that he had made such marked progress in so short a time. Three years ago, at the age of seventeen, as recorded in the initial volume of this series, he had been a delivery clerk in a small-town general store—an inexperi-

enced lad in his final year of high school. And now he was a merchandising executive!

Hard work had done it—consistent hard work coupled with good judgment and an open studious mind. Nor is it to be construed from Andy's marked success that his way had been made easy for him. No, indeed. A poor boy, with limited schooling, yet possessed of dauntless determination and unbounded ambition, he had been forced to make his own way.

And how he had enjoyed it! Forgotten now were the early blunders that he had made, so bitter and humiliating to him at the time. He thought only of what lay ahead of him. Advertising Andy! That is what the Cressfield boys had laughingly called him when he worked on the delivery wagon. But now these same early companions spoke of him with more respect. For it was generally conceded throughout the home town that Andy was fast making a mark for himself in the business world. His friends were very proud of him.

As a youth he had stood without the great gates of Industry, as pictured in the advertising pages of national magazines, eagerly looking in. Motor cars! Machinery! Food! Clothing! Such, in composite form, was Industry. He had longed to be a part of it. And now, as a young business man of rare promise, he *was* a part of it. But by no means had his dream been real-

ized. The higher he climbed on the rungs of merchandising success, the higher he wanted to climb. Ambition was a spur to still greater achievement.

Which might make it appear to some that Andy's life was wholly made up of staid advertising procedures and business responsibilities. But such was not the case. When the day's work was done he loved his fun, the same as any normal-minded boy. And it was to his credit that he sought the kind of fun that matched his years.

For the past eight or ten months his chief companion, outside of business hours, had been a wealthy boy by the name of Rodney Chadwick, whose parents had sensibly encouraged the growing intimacy between the two young men. Character meant a great deal more to Mr. Charles Chadwick, president of the Rainbow Tire Company, Manton's foremost industry, than mere social standing. And Mrs. Chadwick, kindly gracious lady that she was, had been as quick as her more experienced husband to recognize the fine qualities in the young advertising specialist. They jointly felt that Andy, with his big advertising and merchandising dreams, would be a steadying influence in their son's life. And it was pleasing to them, moreover, to have a young man of such gentlemanly deportment in the family circle.

On this particular June afternoon (and what normal-minded boy isn't attracted to the water in June!) Rodney had promised to be on hand at five o'clock with his new high-powered roadster, after which it was the plan of the two inseparable chums to speed away to one of the many natural swimming pools that the friendly river provided. Enterprising community that it was, Manton, of course, had its supervised bathing pools as a part of its park system. But the two boys preferred the open stream, where, in certain secluded spots of recent discovery, hampering woolen bathing suits were not always necessary. Then, too, they enjoyed being by themselves. For they found keen delight in each other's society.

A tall, light-haired stenographer brought Andy a handful of letters for his departmental signature. And hurrying with his final duty, he quickly left the stuffy office, with its clicking typewriters and general bustle, so characteristic of each day's close, when he caught the sound of a familiar automobile horn.

Rodney was watching the office door.

"Hi," he cried, his face lighting up, when Andy came briskly into sight in the cindered factory court.

It is doubtful if the bareheaded young driver realized the pleasing picture he made as he sat at the steering wheel of his natty green roadster,

the nickeled trimmings of which glistened in the afternoon sunlight like a collection of rare gems. On the way here the wind had played havoc with his black hair, which now stood up in ripples and ringlets all over his boyish head. The open throat of his spotless sport shirt gave him an added touch of sheer boyishness. Small wonder indeed that his father and mother idolized him. For he was a son to be proud of. And it was to his credit that his parents' attentions had not spoiled him.

Andy, too, natty and neat in his trim business suit and well-groomed footwear, was bareheaded. But the wind having had no chance as yet to muss up his curly hair, he seemed a bit less boyish than his companion and more mature. His round ruddy face, though, with its dancing brown eyes, betrayed his true age. Two boys were they at heart, each appreciative of the other's manly qualities; boys who achieved to be men of the highest type. Truly an ideal comradeship, the only discontenting factor of which was the possibility of later separation.

The roadster's young owner stiffened in pretended indignation when the newcomer, after a word or two of warm greeting, swung his long legs over the low door.

"Say! How do you get that way?"

"What's the matter?" grinned Andy, sinking into the luxurious cushions.

"Hurdler!"

"I always climbed over the door of Denny Landers' car," Andy further grinned, referring to his early job on the delivery wagon.

Rodney was well informed on his chum's early advertising activities.

"This is no truck," he grunted, putting the sleek-lined roadster into velvety motion.

"Well," was Andy's complacent rejoinder, as he further settled himself in comfort, "it looks as good as a truck to me."

"You're hopeless."

"Say, Rod, have you got a chocolate bar parked in your clothes? I'm as hungry as a bear."

"You shouldn't eat before you go in swimming."

"Bu-lieve me, kid," Andy's thoughts returned to his work, as was frequently the case when the two were together, "plenty of things happened around the old joint this P.M. to stir up my appetite."

"Somebody order a coaster wagon?" Rodney inquired cheerfully, as the roadster further gained speed, a cloud of dust arising behind it like a misshapen genie.

"Huh! You should have seen the order that we got from New York City. Seven thousand coasters."

"Do they know you?"

"Who?"

"The people who gave you the order."

"I should hope to snicker. For I called on them in person last month. I didn't get much encouragement, though. Never having dealt with us, they seemed skeptical of our product. So, was I ever elaborately teakettled when their order came in? Which proves, old kid, that quality is the deciding factor after all."

"What did they do?" laughed Rodney. "Take one of your Comet Coasters apart, piece by piece, thus comparing it with other coasters?"

"That is what I asked them to do," Andy nodded. "For I had a hunch that they discounted a great deal of my selling talk. 'Oh, he's a boy,' was the thought that I read in their minds. 'We can't depend on him.' "

The lure of spring was in the air. Both boys felt it. And though they made no mention of it, as is the nature of youth, the beauty of the countryside, with its emerald carpets and lush foliage, filled them with pleasing contentment.

"Want to drive?" Rodney spoke generously, as they left the flats of the valley and entered a road that wound here and there among the wooded hills.

"No, thanks," Andy spoke lazily.

"I suppose you'll be buying a car of your own one of these days," was Rodney's natural comment.

"Not this year," Andy spoke earnestly. "For I'm paying for a home."

"Where?"

"In Cressfield.. At my suggestion Mother traded in our old house in Channery Court toward a modern bungalow. And I'm paying the difference."

"I've often wondered why your mother never moved to Manton," Rodney continued the intimate conversation.

"She's bound to Cressfield by many close ties, Rod. It was there that she spent the most of her married life; and it was there that my father was buried. Besides," and here Andy disguised the real thought in his mind, "I haven't a life's contract with the Boy Products Company. I stand in with them to-day. But to-morrow they may replace me with an older and more experienced man at the business."

"As though I'd believe that," scoffed the driver.

"It's a possibility, Rod."

"But I thought you had stock in the company?"

"I have."

And Andy told in detail how the twenty shares of common stock, now worth one hundred and ten dollars a share, had been given to him as a bonus by old Mr. Warman, whose grandson,

George Warman, the heaviest stockholder, was now in charge of the business.

As has been recorded in the preceding volume of this series, Andy, then associated with the Rollins and Hatch advertising agency of Chicago, had launched an ill-advised carriage-marketing campaign. It was soon learned, however, that there was no market for carriages. Either the old carriage company had to completely dissolve; or adopt a new line.

When Andy suggested coaster wagons, Mr. Warman quickly picked up the idea, agreeing to finance the proposed new company if the young advertising specialist would consent to locate in Manton and take charge of the merchandising, the aged manufacturer having reached the age where he wanted to "go fishing," as he expressed it, leaving the business in the capable hands of his grandson.

After the way in which he had bungled the carriage campaign—thanks to the trickery of a junior partner!—it never had occurred to Andy for a single instant that anybody connected with the old carriage company, least of all its wealthy owner, would tender him a job. But he was glad to learn that the manufacturer still had confidence in him. And wanting to correct his blunder, as best he could, he had gratefully accepted their offer.

So the new company had been organized, with a paid-in capital of twenty-five thousand dollars. Less than twenty years old himself, George Warman had picked another young man (Harry Harnden) to head the accounting department, and still another (Tim Dine) to run the factory. So, with Andy at the head of the merchandising department, it was truly a company of boys engaged in the manufacture of products for boys. There had been times when disaster threatened the struggling concern. But the young executives under George's gritty leadership had battled against all obstacles, even patent litigation. And now it was generally conceded in Manton business circles that the ultimate success of the company was assured.

Brusque in speech and manner, even rough at times so aggressive was he by nature, the young president praised his capable advertising assistant on all sides, rightly crediting Andy with a leading part in the company's success. Rodney knew this. Which explains why he had refused to take Andy seriously when the latter spoke of the uncertainty of his present position.

It was far more probable, the Manton boy struck at the truth of the matter, that the restless young advertising executive was beginning to tire of his present work. For the new company's biggest merchandising problems had been solved. And having performed his work here, what more

natural than that Andy should want to return to the city?

"Does George Warman know?" Rodney finally spoke up.

"Know what?"

"That you're going to quit?"

It was now Andy's turn to be silent.

"How did you guess it, Rod?"

"Oh," the word was spoken with peculiar fervor, "I know you, Andy. . . . Gee! I hate to think of you going away. What's the matter, anyway?—isn't your present job big enough for you?"

There was an uneasy laugh.

"I guess I'm like my father, Rod."

"What do you mean?"

"I like to tackle new problems and assume new responsibilities."

"But you told me yourself that your father never accumulated anything."

Which was true, as Andy made no attempt to deny.

"Dad was tied down to Cressfield, Rod. And there's nothing much for a fellow in a small town—I soon found that out."

"But you've got a good job, Andy."

"I know it," came the reflective admission. "But I'm young. And there are bigger jobs to be had."

Rodney was struck by a sudden happy thought.

"How would you like to work for Dad?"

"No, Rod," Andy slowly shook his head. "I want to go back to the city."

"To work for Mr. Rollins?"

"I have a job waiting for me there whenever I choose to accept it. Then, too, old man, you must remember that it never was my intention to stay here indefinitely. I've told you that right along."

"Yes," Rodney spoke in a doleful voice. "I know. But I've been hoping that you'd change your mind. For you're the best pal I ever had, Andy."

"Thanks, Rod."

"A lot of fellows hang around me because I have a car and money. As though I don't know it! But I never had that feeling about you."

"What a fellow is at heart means a whole lot more to me than what he has in his pockets," Andy spoke sensibly; then added reminiscently: "Did I ever tell you about Clarence Corey? I used to hate him when I lived in Cressfield. Not so much because he was rich, but because of his bossy arrogant ways. Somehow I got the idea that all rich kids were like him. So, as you can imagine, it was a real treat to me when I met you."

"Dad says that riches are a responsibility. He could build a million-dollar palace, if he wanted to, and live accordingly. But instead, he prefers

to put his major earnings back into the business, so that still more men can find employment there at good wages. Which, *I* think, is the right idea."

"You and your dad are friends worth having, Rod."

"That's what we think about you."

Andy was human.

"Does your dad really care for me, Rod?"

"You should know that he does," the other boy spoke simply. "And Mother, too."

Then both boys lapsed into silence.

The brakes squealed as the car swung down a winding hill. And there in front of them, visible through the trees that lined its banks, was the river. Opening a gate, they followed a rutted wood-lot road with its bordering wild flowers to a sheltered cove where for more than thirty minutes they splashed in the water with the abandon of ten-year-olds. Then, dressing, they took a different route back to town where Mrs. Chadwick had supper waiting for them.

"What do you know about it, Dad," Rodney disconsolately addressed his father later in the evening, the two boys having separated for the night. "Andy's going to quit."

Mr. Chadwick was engaged with some business papers at the big library table.

"What seems to be the trouble?" the financier glanced up from his work.

"Oh, he thinks he can get a better job in the city."

"Considering his age, I would say that he has a very good job where he is. Not many young men of twenty are as well situated."

"That's exactly what I tell him. He has stock in the company, too. You see, when the new company was organized Mr. Warman, after giving George one hundred and ninety shares, set aside sixty shares, which were to be divided among Andy, Harry Harnden and Tim Dine in case the company succeeded. They did fine the first year, as you know. And on top of distributing the bonus stock, a dividend of ten per cent was declared on the total stock, which netted Andy another two hundred dollars. *I* think he's lucky, Dad. And I further think he ought to content himself where he is. For he's got a good job. And Manton is a good town. So what more can he ask for?"

There was pride in the manufacturer's eyes.

"You're right, Rodney. Manton *is* a good town. I know of none better in the whole state. And I'm glad to learn that you have the same feeling toward it that I have. According to my notion too many boys respond to the somewhat theatrical lure of the great cities. As a matter of fact, the smaller towns contain more real opportunities in proportion to the population than the larger places. I've found that to

be true. And certainly we have need of bright boys like you and Andy in the smaller centers. I hope we can keep him here. And it isn't improbable that I will broach the subject to him if the opportunity presents itself."

Rodney's eyes were noticeably happier in their expression.

"He'll listen to you, Dad. For he thinks you're the cat's elbows."

"My word! The cat's elbows! What do you mean?"

"To-morrow noon," planned the laughing son, "I'll bring him home to lunch. And then you can talk to him."

"Andy is a very promising boy," the manufacturer further contributed to the conversation. "He has good judgment for one of his years; and he backs this up with tremendous ambition. I'm wondering, though, if his somewhat unusual success isn't liable to work him harm in the end. We should all be conscious of our limitations. Yet he seems to feel that his capacities are boundless."

Rodney spoke eagerly.

"You tell him, Dad. As I say, he'll listen to you."

Again that humorous expression crossed the financier's face.

"The cat's elbows! I fancy that I shall have various things to discuss with this restless young

friend of yours at the lunch table to-morrow noon."

Rodney slipped an arm around his father's neck.

"You're bully, Dad. I wish that Andy had a father like you."

It was a sultry evening. And to invite the fragrant evening air, as it first caressed the lush foliage in the surrounding garden, the room's windows had been thrown open. But neither the manufacturer or his son suspected at the moment that their words had fallen upon a pair of outside ears.

A strange chapter having opened in his young life, without a moment's warning, Andy Blake, dazed and bewildered by the dramatic turn of his personal affairs, had come here to say good-by to his beloved chum.

But later the shadowy figure left the fragrant garden as quietly and as stealthily as it had come. And thus did Andy drop out of the lives of those who knew and loved him.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

NOT until the following noon was the alarm spread throughout the coaster-wagon factory that the company's popular young advertising manager had mysteriously disappeared.

George Warman was the first one in the organization to discover that the advertising executive wasn't at his desk. It was odd, the young president thought, that the important department head should elect to spend the morning in his room without sending some word to the office in explanation of his absence. Was he ill? At nine-thirty George telephoned to the Y.M.C.A. where Andy roomed. Later Harnden was summoned to the president's private office.

"Say, Harry," came the terse inquiry, "how are Blake's departmental accounts?"

"In excellent shape, so far as I know to the contrary."

"I wish you'd check up on things in his department. See if you can find any reason why he should want to disappear."

"Disappear?" the accountant repeated, anx-

iously searching the other's eyes. "What do you mean?"

"It is the report of the desk clerk at the Y.M.C.A. that Blake has suddenly left town."

Harnden leaned forward.

"And you suspect irregularities in his accounts?"

George vigorously shook his head.

"Not at all. As a matter of fact, I'd trust that boy with the company's last dollar. For I know—and you, too, for that matter—that he's absolutely on the square. But when the news of his strange disappearance gets noised around town, people are going to talk—those local wiseacres, I mean, who think that boys are duds—or even worse. You know how they've been talking about us, predicting that each month would see our finish. Boy managers! And boy salesmen! Particularly have these old mossbacks maintained that Andy was riding for a fall. And how lovely for them now to start the report that he skinned out with a big wad of the company's money. It's up to us to forestall any such damaging lies. So get me the facts, Harry. In the meantime I'll wire Blake's mother and Mr. Rollins, hoping that one or the other of them will be able to clear up the mystery."

Neither spoke for a moment.

Harnden was not of the emotional type. Few bookkeepers are. For as a rule the handling of

prosaic figures gives one a decidedly matter-of-fact view of life.

"Instead of jumping to the conclusion that Blake has skinned out," the accountant spoke sensibly, "I'd sooner think he's on the track of another big order."

"But why didn't he telephone to us before leaving town?"

"Maybe he left in the middle of the night while we were asleep."

"It is suspected," George's earnestness deepened, "that he did leave town in the middle of the night. At ten-thirty he went up to his room, stopping at the registration desk for his key, where, in his usual jolly style, he joked with the clerk. It is known that he entertained a visitor in his room between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock. And here is where the mystery begins—for the visitor so completely escaped observation as to lead to the theory that he entered and left the room by way of the fire escape."

"Did the desk clerk tell you that?"

"Yes."

"And he knows for certain that there was a visitor in Andy's room at the time specified?"

"Two voices were heard in the room."

"By whom?"

"One of the other lodgers."

"Did this lodger get the drift of the conversation?"

"It's his statement, as passed along to me by the desk clerk, that Andy and his visitor talked in low tense tones."

"And is it further presumed that Andy accompanied his mysterious visitor down the fire escape?"

"Yes."

"But nobody actually saw him leave the building?"

"No."

"Did anyone see him after he entered his room?"

"No."

George then got Rodney Chadwick on the telephone. But instead of helping to clear up the mystery, the Manton boy was literally dumbfounded when told that his chum had disappeared over night. Throughout the balance of the day Rodney haunted the room that the missing one had so strangely vacated, hoping to pick up a clew of some sort that would aid in the mystery's solution. A brief note (evidently written in great haste or under conditions of extraordinary excitement) had been found on the dresser, requesting that the room's contents be kept intact until their owner returned—and a check attached to the note paid the room rent many weeks in advance.

Rodney in time enlisted the aid of the local police. For he began to suspect foul play. But

the police scoffed at this theory, giving as their collective opinion that the popular young advertising man had disappeared voluntarily. Something had turned up on a moment's notice to make him want to disappear; and he had acted accordingly. The fact that he was holding his room (with its closetful of clothing) proved that he intended to return.

The police having dropped the case, Rodney motored to Cressfield to question the vanished one's mother. And this being his first visit to his chum's birthplace, he experienced peculiar emotions as landmarks that had been described to him so vividly now came to his attention. There on opposite sides of the rather shabby main street were the Landers and Hazzel stores. And there in the next block, facing the small park, where a weathered fountain functioned dispiritedly, was the printing office in the back of which, in a small room used principally by the printer's son, the delivery clerk and his enthusiastic chums had worked out those early advertising campaigns.

Ouija boards! Aunt Tillie's Taffy Tarts! Fresh-roasted coffee! Hot-cross buns! Rodney had heard the details of these exciting campaigns many times. And now his memory of the campaigns seemed particularly vivid.

But no one in Cressfield knew where Andy Blake was. And when Rodney finally located the

new bungalow on Walnut Street he found it locked and deserted. Mrs. Blake, the next-door neighbor freely told the disturbed investigator, was spending the summer with relatives in Ontario, Canada.

This caused Rodney further thought.

Was Andy, too, in Ontario? Rodney wondered. Plainly, was his conclusion, some strange disaster had befallen the little family. As though drawn by an invisible magnet he turned in at the white arched gateway of the roadside cemetery where Andy's father had been buried. Little did the visitor dream, though, as he stood beside the low mound, how very close he was to the truth of his chum's disappearance. Afterwards he recalled that trip to the cemetery with its peculiar accompanying emotions. And he marveled at his stupidity.

Andy had made it appear that he was dissatisfied with his present position. He had spoken of going to the city. Could it be, Rodney asked himself, as again and again he turned over in his mind the events of that memorable afternoon, trying to attach a hidden meaning to his friend's words, that the young advertising man had known that sooner or later he would have to change locations? Then, had some unexpected premature development sent him flying into the north with his peculiar secret?

But who was the mysterious visitor? And

how had the pair left town? Further, had Mrs. Blake joined them in their flight into Canada? Or had she followed them north?

Rodney seemed unable to dismiss from his mind the thought that the chum he had loved and trusted had failed him. And distressed by the marked change in their son, over whom a noticeable sadness and depression had settled, like a leaden blanket, Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick decided to spend the balance of the summer in Italy, hopeful that a change of scene would bring forgetfulness. But Rodney, loyal pal that he was, refused point-blank to go abroad. A motor trip into Ontario would be much more to his liking, he said. So the family car was made ready; the big house was closed for the summer; and the family of three set forth on their journey.

At the coaster-wagon factory the missing one's work was carried on by his assistant, a bright-eyed, capable girl. And things went well with the company as a whole, for Andy had planned his work with great care and foresight. But the conferences in the president's office seemed incomplete and spiritless without the ruddy, glowing face that the others had come to know so well.

Each morning George Warman eagerly searched the incoming mail for some word from the missing executive whose position was being held open for him. But no word was received,

the mystery seemingly deepening with each successive day.

"I'm going to hire a private detective," George thus disclosed his plans to Harnden one morning in early July. "For I'll never rest easy until I know what became of that kid. If you must know the truth, Harry, I feel lost without him. I'm never satisfied that we're making the most of our opportunities. We need him. And I'm going to try and find him and bring him back to his desk. Or if harm has befallen him, as I sometimes think, the sooner we learn the truth of the matter the better for us."

And now, as our story takes us into the adjoining state of Indiana, new characters step into the foreground, chief among them a boy by the name of Eddie Garry, through whom we will learn the truth about the unusual mission—the peculiar secret service—that was intrusted to Andy the night he disappeared.

Had not an adverse Fate interfered with his secret affairs, the perturbed young advertising man might have returned to Manton within a week. But, as his business associates had begun to suspect, a strange misfortune had befallen him, as will be revealed through the following chapters. And just as he had schemed to move secretly in the background, to the full accomplishment of his purpose, he involuntarily became a part of the story's background.

HE HATED THE MONOTONY OF TRAMPING AROUND AND AROUND A FIELD.

CHAPTER III

EDDIE GARRY

Even before Eddie Garry came quietly into the hot farmhouse kitchen for dinner he knew that his aunt and uncle had received some unusual word through the morning mail. For he had seen the rural mail carrier stop at the roadside mail box. And later on he had seen his excitable aunt fly to the barn with a fluttering paper in her hand, obviously in quest of her husband.

Something about Herb! It must be that, Eddie concluded. His thoughts filled him with bitterness. And going back to his work he was more discontented than ever.

Oh, how he hated the monotony of tramping around and around a field, with the cultivator's dry dust seeping through his patched overalls and the stench of the sweating horses in his nostrils. He hated the tang of the tilled earth and the smell of farm animals. He hated everything that was a part of farm life. At the moment, as he unhappily compared his own discouraging circumstances with those of his more fortunate cousin, he told himself that he even

hated the two elder relatives who had opened their plain home to him when the death of his widowed mother had left him an orphan in his first high-school year.

"All I am is a drudge," he complained to himself bitterly. "I stay at home and slave, with nothing ahead of me but hard work, while Herb has it easy at college. *He* gets all the chances, and everything else. Aunt Hattie sends him money every week. But does she ever give *me* money? Or is anything ever said about *me* going to college?" The questions were answered with a harsh laugh.

But some of the discontented one's bitterness had worn off by noon. For he was not an unfair boy—at least he tried not to be. And he realized, on deeper thought, that he owed a great deal to his uncle and aunt. Poor people, they had cheerfully given him a home on their unproductive Indiana farm; and in the four years that he had been under their roof not a single unkind word had been spoken to him. Moreover, they had put him through high school. Remembering these things, he suddenly felt ashamed of himself for his morning's bitter thoughts. He hadn't any right to expect as much as Herb, for he was only a penniless nephew while the other boy was an only child. Anyway, in another three years he would be twenty-one. Then he would be free to do as he pleased. It wouldn't kill

him to put in these few intervening years on his uncle's farm, even though he hated farm work. Still, he wished . . .

Dinner was on the table—steaming dishes of potatoes and ham and cabbage. There was a dish of carrots, too, and a thick rhubarb pie cut in four big pieces. It was Aunt Hattie's notion that her "men folks" needed a lot of cooked food, and three times a day, winter and summer, her table was laden with steaming dishes. To-day her face was flushed from bending over the hot stove. But instead of complaining about the heat, and the monotony of her farm work, she sang snatches of a church song as she quickly moved back and forth between the pantry and the table.

"Oh, Eddie!" she cried, as her nephew came quietly into the kitchen. "Guess who's coming to-morrow."

The boy hung up his straw hat.

"Herb?"

The mother's face was radiant.

"We got a letter from him this morning. His college closed on the twelfth. And he's starting home to-day."

"On the train?"

"No. He's catching rides with passing tourists."

Eddie looked into the sitting room, where a tall, gaunt, weary-eyed man sat reading a news-

paper. A canary in a flower-filled bay window lifted its voice in a burst of song at sight of the rugged, healthy boy. A cat came and rubbed against his legs.

It purred as he looked down at it.

Lifting the purring animal into his bare arms, the reflective farm boy sought the shade of a spreading elm tree in the grassy front yard, where he stretched himself on his back, the cat settling in lazy comfort on his bronzed breast. This was a pretty good home after all, was his earnest thought, as he listened to the continued dinner preparations in the near-by kitchen. Certainly, no mother could be kinder to him than Aunt Hattie. She had her odd ways, of course. But they were loving ways. Dear old Aunt Hattie! Always looking after the welfare of others with no thought seemingly of her own pleasures or conveniences. True, she favored Herb. But that was all right. She should favor him, for he was her own son.

The cat's presence under the tree drew the attention of a pair of pursy robins. And while Eddie knew that their chattering tirade was directed at the sleeping animal, he let himself believe that the birds were scolding him for his unjustified discontentment. "Don't act like a child," they were saying. "You're a young man now. And until you are twenty-one it is your duty to stay on the farm and thus repay your

hard-working uncle and aunt for all that they have done for you."

There was a flash of green as a humming bird passed over his head. And his attention thus drawn to a gorgeous flower bed a few feet away (for Aunt Hattie gave her yard the same strenuous care that she gave her house, rambling weathered structure that it was, and badly in need of paint), he lazily watched a huge yellow-barred bumblebee as it vainly sought to get at the honey in a deep-throated star flower. Again and again the burly worker tried to penetrate the flower's store-house, buzzing angrily over its failures. The air was full of other sounds, too—the distant plaintive call of a quail; the pleading notes of a mournful turtle dove; the discordant chorus of persistent crickets. Clucking hens worked up and down the wire fence that protected the flower garden. Combined, it was the song of summer; the song of the countryside. The magic of June lay everywhere.

"Yes," Eddie repeated to himself, "this is a good home. No boy, especially an orphan boy like me, could ask for a better one."

But his youthful discontentment was too deeply rooted to be dismissed on a moment's notice. And in his heart he knew that the old longings would return. But it was his determination now to keep a better check on himself. His chance would come later on.

"Dinner's ready, Pa," came the summons from the bustling housewife as the farm boy returned to the kitchen. "And when you come, bring Herb's letter for Eddie to read."

There was a snatch of song.

"Oh, I'm so happy! To think that my boy will be home to-morrow! I haven't seen him since last Christmas. He was intending to work on the Great Lakes this summer—you remember what he wrote to you a few weeks ago, Eddie. But now he says he's coming home for the summer."

The three were soon seated at the table.

"I suppose he'll get a job in town," said Eddie, bending over his plate.

A job in town! That is what *he* had wanted to do in concluding his high-school studies—work in town instead of on this hated farm. He had thought about it untold times and had dreamed of it nights. There were factories in Sun Prairie —factories and real opportunities.

"I tell Pa," Aunt Hattie ran on, more talkative to-day than usual, "that we'll have to be very saving this summer so that we can do more for Herb when he goes back to college in the fall. For I've heard that the third year in college is always the hardest. And if we can send him more money he won't have to do so much outside work."

In spite of himself Eddie winced under his

breath. And then, in a feeling of queer reckless humor, he wondered if he would have to go without shoes! Oh, well, he should worry. Three more years . . .

But how silly of him to think about going without clothing of any sort. He was acting the baby again.

An observing man of quiet, studious characteristics, Alexander Garry seemed more interested in the changing moods of his nephew than in his wife's flow of conversation. He silently studied the younger one across the table. And a troubled look came into his grizzled, sun-browned face.

"Don't you feel well, Eddie?" came the quiet earnest inquiry.

The boy glanced up quickly at the unexpected question. And at the moment he saw something in the faded blue eyes that strangely reminded him of his father. He thought hungrily of his early boyhood—of how he used to crawl into his father's lap and go to sleep.

"Why . . . sure thing. I feel all right."

"You aren't eating."

There was a forced laugh.

"I haven't got started yet."

Aunt Hattie beamed as the young farmer filled his plate.

"That's it, Eddie. Take a big helping. For growing boys like you need plenty of food."

"Sometimes I think I eat too much," grinned

the farm boy. "But if I do it's your own fault, Aunt Hattie. For everything you cook tastes bully."

The simple compliment filled the housewife with added happiness.

"Your pa used to say that I was the best cook in the whole state. And what a pleasure it was to prepare meals for him. For a better feeder never sat at my table. Still, that's characteristic of all railroad men, I guess. There was my sister Kate. Thought, when she started a boarding house in Kansas City, that she was going to get rich. But when *I* heard that her boarders were all railroad men, I told your Uncle Alex what to expect. Nor was I wrong. As I understand it, they fairly ate her out of house and home. And now she and her husband are back on a farm."

Railroad men! The younger one winced with inward pain as a picture arose in his mind of crumpled passenger coaches and twisted steel rails. For it was in such a wreck as this that the beloved male parent had lost his life. Which explains why the orphaned boy never had wanted to follow railroading. The intersecting railroads, with their throbbing locomotives and rumbling coaches, an industrial atmosphere so appealing to most imaginative boys, filled him with fear and horror.

The farmer cleared his throat.

"How would you like to go to town this afternoon, Eddie?"

"There's nothing going on in town."

"You've been working pretty steady lately. And all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Yes," the farmer wisely decided, nodding his shaggy head, "you can make the trip to town this afternoon instead of me. And you can take the eggs along."

Eddie grinned.

"Do you think I can get 'Lizzie' started?"

"I'd sooner walk," Aunt Hattie spoke petulantly, "than to ride in that rickety old truck. Everything rattles. And it always stops just when you least want it to."

"Eddie can make it run," waggled the farmer, regarding the boy with affectionate eyes. "And the more it rattles the better he likes it."

"Oh, dear!" sighed the weary wife, resting her head in her hands. "I do wish we were rich. Then we could have a decent car like the other people around here. Herb would enjoy a new car. In fact," the doting mother ran on, "we ought to buy a new car for him if he's going to work in town this summer. Otherwise, how will he be able to get back and forth?"

"He can use the truck."

"Oh, Pa! Herb ride in that old rattletrap!"

"*We* ride in it."

"I know. But Herb's been away to college.

And that makes a difference. . . . I wonder if we ought to buy a new mattress for his bed."

"Why can't he sleep with Eddie?"

"Oh, he'll want a room by himself—where he can keep his books and study. He'll have a lot of college trinkets, too. So I think I'll fix up the east bedroom for him—it's the most pleasant room we have. I'll do it right after dinner so that everything will be ready for him when he gets here to-morrow. And maybe you had better let Eddie cultivate this afternoon, Pa, and go to town yourself, as you had planned on doing. For I feel that we should see about getting a new mattress."

"Let Herb have our mattress, Mother," said the farmer dryly, "and we'll sleep on the floor."

Eddie laughed gently at the blank expression on his aunt's face. Then he left the table and went outside. After considerable fussing and tinkering he got a few encouraging "barks" out of the rickety farm truck. Changing his clothes, he listened patiently while his aunt instructed him about the marketing of the eggs. They ought to bring thirty cents a dozen, she said. But he was told to inquire around among the various dealers as it frequently happened that one paid a cent or two more than the others. There were things to buy with the egg money—everything was written down on a slip of paper.

Eddie glanced at the slip and laughed.

"Three kinds of cookies! Are we going to have a party, Aunt Hattie?"

"Herb likes cookies. . . . Now, I wonder if I've forgotten anything. Dear me! I'm so excited I hardly know which end I'm standing on. Oh, yes, Eddie, you might get a dozen bananas. For Herb likes banana pie. And be sure and go to the post office. There may be a later letter from him."

CHAPTER IV

THE TWO COUSINS

EDDIE wouldn't have been a real boy if he hadn't enjoyed the three-mile ride to town, with the truck's motor missing fire like a snorting colt and a million things rattling. Swinging down a rocky sun-baked hill, he suddenly remembered about the two crates of eggs. Then, as he turned to see if the eggs were riding safely, a sudden "pop!" lifted him off the seat.

"Dog-gone! A blow-out! If this isn't the worst old junk-pile in seventeen states," he complained. But he said it with a boyish laugh.

There was a small wooden bridge at the foot of the hill, spanning a creek that ran prettily in curves in a sandy, willow-fringed bed, and in jacking up the truck's right front wheel, to remove the flattened tire, Eddie thoughtlessly took up so much of the narrow country road directly in front of the bridge that another car, coming down the opposite hill, had to stop.

"Why, it's Eddie Garry!" came a pleased youthful voice, and craning his neck over the wheel the young tire repairer recognized Laura Salzar, the only child of the president and gen-

eral manager of the Electro-Call Company, one of Sun Prairie's leading industries.

"I was dumb," he grinned, going forward, tire tools in hand, "to take up the whole road. If you'll wait a moment I'll let the jack down and pull to one side."

It isn't within the talents of a healthy boy to change a tire without getting his face dirty, especially on a hot June day. And not only was Eddie's forehead streaked with grime, where he had wiped away the sweat, but his nose was daubed with black grease. How pleasingly boyish he looked, the girl thought, as he stood in the bright sunshine, bareheaded, his hair ruffled, his shirt open at the throat. Yet she smiled at the grease spot.

"Oh, we aren't in any hurry," she said gayly. "Are we, Mr. Halliday?"

The young farmer had been wondering, in natural curiosity, who the broad-shouldered, black-eyed stranger was in the right-hand front seat. Some out-of-town business man probably. The quick young eyes took in the neat-fitting checkered suit and the modish straw hat. And in looking into the future, in wistful boyish dreams, he suddenly wondered if ever he would come back to Sun Prairie looking as polished and business-like as this.

"I would like to have you meet Mr. Thomas Halliday," the smiling girl introduced. "He is

the manager of our Chicago office and one of Daddy's star salesmen. This is Eddie Garry, Mr. Halliday. If you can coax him to wipe the grease from the end of his nose you'll find that he's quite good-looking."

This was one of the greatest moments in Eddie's life. To be thus introduced to the Electro-Call Company's star salesman—*the* Mr. Halliday, of whom frequent mention was made in the Sun Prairie newspaper! A branch manager, too. The farm boy hadn't dreamed that any such honor could befall him.

"I can't shake hands with you," he grinned, showing his dirty palms. "But I'd like to," he added boyishly, unable to remove his shining eyes from the successful man.

"Come across," laughed the pleasant salesman, putting out his hand.

"Oh, I'll get you all dirty."

"I'm not afraid of a little dirt. Come on."

There was a warm hand-clasp. A thrill ran up and down Eddie's spine. It was as though he had just shaken hands with royalty. Yet, boy that he was, and uninformed on many subjects, it puzzled him that a man of Mr. Halliday's exceptional talents could act so common. He had yet to learn that a salesman's greatest personal asset is humanness.

"Tire trouble?" the man inquired genially, thinking to himself, as a quick, keen judge of

character, that here was a mighty likeable, bright-faced boy.

"A blow-out. It's an old tire."

"I've fixed dozens of blow-outs," laughed the salesman, getting to work with the tire tools in spite of the boy's almost pained protests. Soon the worn casing lay on the grass beside the road. Then the little vulcanizing tool was brought out. Having recovered from the shock of having a twenty-thousand-dollar-a-year business man help him with his damaged tire, Eddie was enjoying the situation. Yet he still was puzzled. He never had dreamed that a big man could act like *this*.

"I was taking Mr. Halliday out to see Daddy's stock farm," informed the girl, while the cemented patch was "cooking."

Eddie looked at the salesman in quick surprise.

"Are you interested in farms?"

"Oh, yes. Very much so. Mrs. Halliday and I dream of the time when we'll be able to retire to the country with our family of boys. Do you live on a farm?"

"Yes, sir."

"I envy you."

"You wouldn't," the boy burst out, hardly realizing what he was saying, "if you knew how I hated it."

"Why do you hate it?"

"It's drudgery."

There was a brief silence as the trained character reader studied the flushed face.

"You don't look like a lazy boy."

Eddie stiffened (to the girl's inward amusement). And his mouth settled firmly.

"I'm not lazy," he said doggedly. "But if you were to give me my pick of all the jobs in the world, farming would be my last choice."

"And what would be your first choice?"

There was a wistful, yet bashful look in the boy's warm eyes.

"Shall I tell you, Mr. Halliday?"

"Why not?"

"I'd like to be what you are."

"What do you mean?"

"I'd like to be a salesman."

There was another brief pause.

"A salesman, eh? Do you know anything about selling?"

"No, sir."

"Then what makes you think you'd prefer that kind of work?"

"Oh, I just have that feeling. I look through the newspapers and see the advertising. And then I imagine myself selling those products." There was a quick embarrassed laugh as the boy realized what he was saying. "I suppose I sound silly to you."

"Not at all," the words were spoken quickly. "I think you're an exceptional boy."

There was eagerness in the young face now.

"Do you think I'll ever make a salesman, Mr. Halliday?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, gee! If only I could. Do you hire boys, Mr. Halliday?"

"We have an office boy," was the bland reply.

Eddie accepted the rebuke.

"I guess you think I'm cuckoo, all right," he spoke quietly.

"If you don't like farming," Laura Salzar spoke up, "why don't you see Daddy about getting a job in his factory?"

Eddie didn't say anything.

"The Electro-Call Company is a good concern to work for," put in the salesman loyally. "And if you make good in the factory I dare say they'll give you a trial on the road. For they've done that with other young men."

The boy's continued sober silence gave the wise executive a clew to the situation.

"Are your folks keeping you on the farm?" came quietly.

"I live with my uncle and aunt. They're poor. The farm isn't much—just forty acres. Everything dries out in the summer time. Maybe I wouldn't hate it so if it was a good farm. But it seems as though the harder I work the less I have to show for it."

It was on the tip of the discontented one's

tongue to say something about his cousin. But he refrained. However, the girl seemed to read his thoughts.

"Is Herb coming home this summer, Eddie?"

"Yes. We expect him to-morrow."

"Well, why can't he run the farm and let you work in town for a change?"

"He wouldn't want to do that—after being away to college. And I don't think Aunt Hattie would want him to do it. No, I've got to stick to the farm—till Herb's through college, at least, or till I'm twenty-one. I hate it, though. There's no use denying it. You can't imagine how I feel, Mr. Halliday, when the factory whistles blow in the morning, calling the men to work. I always listen for the whistles. And it seems to me as though they're calling me, too. They keep calling, morning after morning."

It seemed to the warm-hearted girl that never had she seen a more dramatic, appealing picture than was presented by the farm boy, as he stood there in the June sunlight. One forgot his grimy face in looking into his emotional eyes. Even the experienced business man was strangely stirred.

"Eddie," said the salesman slowly, putting a firm hand on the boy's shoulder, "I felt at first that you were foolishly dissatisfied with your farm work. I felt that you weren't trying to take an interest in things, as you should. But I see now where your heart is. You were born to

be a part of Industry. And whether it's this summer, or when you're twenty-one, I hope that you get your chance. . . . I'd like to have you write to me occasionally, telling me how you're getting along. Will you do that?"

The boy couldn't trust himself to words. And his hand trembled as he took the calling card that the manager held out to him.

"I'm going to try and be less discontented," he said huskily. His eyes were wistful. "And some day . . ."

"And some day," the salesman picked up, spiritedly patting the boy on the back, "you may be my right-hand man, eh?"

"I hope so," came earnestly.

"Get into the factory and learn the line," was the experienced manager's parting advice. "The more you learn about the stuff the better equipped you'll be to sell it later on. One of the first things I tell a new salesman is *know your line.* Study everything, inside of the factory and out, from a selling standpoint. Talk with salesmen when you get the chance. Listen to their stories about their work. You'll find they like to talk about themselves! Get some good books on selling, written by practical men. This ought to keep you busy for a few years, and prepare you for later big things. And, finally, good luck, Eddie."

"Lizzie" performed nobly throughout the bal-

ance of the afternoon. And having purchased the last item on his aunt's list, Eddie started for home.

A mile outside of town he overtook a long-legged, broad-shouldered young college man, swinging down the middle of the sun-baked road.

"Herb!" came the driver's surprised cry, as he brought the rattling truck to a sharp, shivering pause.

"Hi, Eddie," was the walker's hilarious greeting. "Didn't expect to see me so soon, hey?" and a grin spread from ear to ear.

"Aunt Hattie got a letter this morning telling her to look for you to-morrow."

Herb Garry threw his traveling bag into the truck.

"I got away a day sooner than I expected. How are you, old top?"

"Oh, fine and dandy."

"How's 'Lizzie?' "

"As wabbly as ever."

"Let me drive, will you?" The truck was put into motion. And as though the worn-out engine realized that there had been a change of drivers, it snorted worse than ever. "Hot dog!" shrieked the boy at the wheel, putting his cap on backwards. "This is the berries."

Eddie grinned.

"You'll shock Aunt Hattie to death if you drive into the yard in this old rattletrap."

"Ma well?"

"Sure thing."

"Pa, too?"

"He's cultivating this afternoon."

"What have you been doing all spring?—currying the chickens?"

"Oh, working in the field mostly."

"Everything all right?"

"I guess so. How did you come out at college?"

"Lovely. Had to work like a nailer, though. Say, I had a card from Laura Salzar the other day. She was in Chicago. Is she home yet?"

"I saw her driving one of her father's cars this afternoon."

"She's a good kid. Guess I'll run down and see her to-night. I want to see Mr. Salzar, too."

Eddie was steadily determined to let no jealous or envious thoughts come between himself and his cousin.

"We figured you'd get a summer job with the Electro-Call Company," said he quietly.

Crossing the creek bridge, the loose planks of which rumbled like a terrific thunderclap, the college boy stopped the truck beside the road in the identical spot where Eddie had earlier made his tire repairs.

"How's the swimming hole?"

"The one up the creek?"

"Sure thing."

"I haven't been there this summer," Eddie confessed.

"Why not?"

"Oh . . . I've been pretty busy."

"But you still like to swim?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, then, let's pile out."

Crawling under the barbed-wire fence, the two cousins hastened along the bank of the winding creek until they came to a secluded spot, several rods from the country road, where the swift current had dished out a huge basin in the sandy soil. And what fun they had! Before dressing they sat in the sun, Herb entertaining the other with an account of his studies and various college activities. Then, on the way back to the truck, they took a side trip into a shaded ravine, where the wild life of the forest scattered at their approach, some of the creatures disappearing into burrows in the ground and others under rocky ledges, and where the boys found great patches of ferns, shooting stars and red honeysuckle, with which they loaded their arms.

"Boy," cried Herb, filling his lungs with the invigorating air, in which was combined the tang of the woodland and the fragrance of the adjacent meadows, "the country sure is wonderful."

There was a small waterfall at the head of the rocky ravine. And here, at Herb's suggestion, they sat on a huge mossy bowlder, tossing pebbles

into the pool that the falling water, through countless ages, had gouged into the sandstone.

"There's fish here," cried Herb, pointing into the depths of the pool.

"Sure thing."

"What are they?—bass?"

"Those black ones are suckers. But there's bass here, all right. A club of Sun Prairie sportsmen has been stocking the streams."

"Bu-lieve me, Eddie, I'm coming back here with a pole and line. For a little old fried bass won't taste so worse, eh?"

"The best time to get a strike," spoke the experienced farm boy, "is just before sunrise."

Herb laughed.

"It sounds lazy to hear me tell it, but I haven't seen the sun rise since last winter."

"Uncle Alex always gets up at sunrise the year around," Eddie spoke simply.

"He wouldn't," Herb grunted, "if he had to sit up till midnight with a textbook under his nose. You can say all you've a mind to, Eddie, about the thrill of college life, but I'm here to tell you that it's a grind. I'm glad I'm home."

"And is it your intention to pile out at sunrise with the rest of us?" Eddie inquired curiously.

"Nothing else but."

Old "Lizzie" presented a distinctly festive appearance throughout the balance of the homeward trip, the boys having laughingly made

windshield decorations of their ferns and flowers. Then, from a rise, the rambling two-story farmhouse came into sight. But however shabby it may have appeared to the college boy, it was home. And he further increased the motor's speed.

Indiana, as a whole, is a state of good farms. But many poor farms are contained within its borders. And it seemed to Alexander Garry that his was the most unproductive farm of them all. He worked hard. No man in the neighborhood worked harder. But the thin topsoil was unable to supply the growing crops with the needed nourishment. A prolonged dry spell wrought disaster. For directly below the topsoil (which seemed to grow thinner each succeeding year) was an immense deposit of gravel—a gigantic sponge, as it were, that quickly drained the topsoil of its moisture.

It was the constant struggle to eke out a living that had broken the farmer's spirits. But he struggled on. And now, as solace of a sort, he had his "boys," as he expressed it—his own son, of whom he was justly proud, and the orphaned son of his younger brother. Yet however deeply he loved them, always when he was near them he experienced a definite uneasiness. For he knew that in their eyes he was a business failure.

There was "company" at the farmhouse. Ed-

die saw a man and woman on the front porch. And a strange automobile was parked in the lane under the spreading elm trees.

At Herb's lusty shouts Aunt Hattie came running from the garden with an apronful of green peas.

"Oh, Herbie! My boy; my big boy!"

"Good old Mum," the son spoke with similar affection, as he in turn clasped the excited parent in his strong young arms. "I fooled you, huh? —got here a day ahead of time."

Never completely forgetful of her housewifely duties, the parent then discovered that her apron was empty.

"Laws-a-me! Where are my peas?"

"Never mind, Mum," laughed the happy son, who had caught sight of the scattered peas. "I'll pick them up for you."

"And did Eddie know that you were coming to-day?"

"No. He overtook me on the road."

"But what has happened to you, Herbie? Your hair is wet."

"Oh, Eddie and I stopped in the hollow for a swim."

"A *swim?* Without a suit?"

"Good heavens, Mum! Why look so shocked? Do the kids around here wear suits?"

"I should think that *you* would want to wear a suit, now that you're a young college man."

Herb laughed gayly.

"Oh, Eddie," the elder's thoughts then turned. "I almost forgot to tell you that there's a man and woman waiting for you on the front porch. They're people you knew in Ohio. I've urged them to stay over night. But they seem to feel that they must go on."

Ohio people! Eddie quickly tried to place the pair in his memory.

"They're the folks you stayed with after your ma died. And they have something for you, they told me, which largely explains why they stopped here. I think it's a chest of books."

Mr. and Mrs. Brantingham! Eddie felt chagrinned, in a way, that he hadn't recognized the visitors at first glance. For Mrs. Brantingham in particular was an outstanding figure! Still, he had not seen them for more than four years.

He dutifully hurried into the farmhouse to welcome the tourists. And he further thanked them for coming out of their way to see him when he learned that they were on their way to Texas, where they expected to make their home.

But if the truth must be told the emotional boy found no pleasure in their company. For they brought to mind those dark days when he had lost his father and mother, the first of whom had met his death on the railroad, as has been mentioned, and the other of whom had later died of a broken heart.

CHAPTER V

A WEDDING PICTURE

"My father made it when he was a boy," Eddie spoke simply, when shown the small wooden chest that the visitors had in their car.

A squat, fleshy woman, noticeably fond of showy clothing and gaudy jewelry, Mrs. Brantingham was quite content to do the talking for both she and her hard-of-hearing husband, the latter of whom used an old-fashioned ear trumpet.

"That's just what I told my husband," the woman loosened her ready tongue. "You know what I said, Henry," she spoke directly into the ear trumpet. "That's the chest, I said, that Mr. Garry made himself when he was a boy. Land of livin'! Hadn't I seen the chest a hundred times in Mrs. Garry's bedroom? And hadn't she told me herself that her husband made it? Sell a chest like that? No, indeed, I said. It belongs to Eddie, I said, and I'm going to see that he gets it. So here it is. As for coming out of our way, you should realize, Eddie, that we were only too glad to do this for you. So don't say another word about it. If you must know the

truth, I feel almost like a second mother to you. And Henry—you never would believe, Eddie, how much *he* missed you after you left us to come here. If he said it once he said it a hundred times: 'Mother, I wish we had adopted that boy. I do for a fact.' And I said: 'Henry, his relatives have first claim on him.' . . . How long was it, Eddie, that you lived with us after your ma died?"

"Four months."

"And you were such a skinny boy then. Just like a rail. Henry, did you *ever* see a boy fill out like he has? Eddie, you're a man. I honestly believe you're taller than Henry. You are, for a fact. Now, what do you know about that? But, then, you should be tall, for I see by this uncle of yours that you come of tall stock. Do you remember your father, Eddie? He was tall, too."

The boy winced.

"Yes," he nodded. "I remember him well."

"Dear me! Those were terrible days—when they brought your pa home, I mean. I never saw a woman take on worse than your ma did. And what a beautiful wreath the railroad men sent. I wanted your ma to take a picture of it. But when I suggested it to her she just looked at me. As I told Henry—you remember what I said, Henry—if it was *my* wreath, I said, I'd want a picture of it—for it must have cost at

least a hundred dollars. The biggest calla lilies that I *ever* saw in all my life. And everybody who has had a death in the family knows what calla lilies cost. But your ma, of course, was the best judge of what she wanted or didn't want. Certainly, if she didn't care for a picture of the wreath it was none of *my* affairs. . . . Have you got a good home here, Eddie?"

"Yes," the boy spoke feelingly.

"As I told Henry when I first looked around —and you mustn't mind if I speak the truth, Eddie, for I'm no hand to beat about the bush —things could look more prosperous. Certainly, your relatives aren't wasting any paint! If this house was mine I wouldn't live in it a week before I gave it a coat of paint. Still, your uncle doesn't look like a shiftless man."

Eddie had a sense of humor.

"My uncle and aunt are very hard-working people," he concealed a smile. "But the land is poor. That's why things look run down. For a farmer can't spend more, in keeping things up, than he earns. And sometimes our crops are a complete failure."

"But why doesn't your uncle sell out and buy a better farm?" came the natural question.

Eddie gave a queer laugh.

"Sell *this* farm? He hasn't a chance in the world. . . . May I take the chest up to my room, Mrs. Brantingham?"

Her attention thus drawn to the chest, the talkative visitor lifted the cover.

"It's full of your old toys, Eddie. There's the jumping-jack that Henry put in your stocking the Christmas he froze his nose. And here's your ma's plush album."

Eddie recognized the album. And when he opened it, with a trembling hand, the first thing that he saw was his parents' wedding picture. Dear old Dad and Mum! What happiness was revealed in the pictured faces . . . what high hopes and glowing ambitions.

"I always said," the woman ran on, looking particularly at the picture of the tall, dark-haired husband, "that your pa was the best-looking man in town. And the wonder was to me that your ma didn't scratch his eyes out with jealousy, for he was always palavering some other woman. Why," the speaker smirked, with a side glance at her stoop-shouldered husband, who, during his mate's frequent long-winded recitals always stood patiently attentive, ready to nod his shaggy head at the proper time, "he even made eyes at *me*. And Henry—yes you did, Henry Brantingham—Henry, as I say, was mad enough to fight wildcats." There was a deep sigh. "Oh, dear! I've often wondered what it would seem like to have a husband whose thoughts rose above beefsteak and gravy. If I must say so, Henry has about as much romance inside of him as a droopy

caterpillar. . . . What was that, Eddie? Oh! . . . Yes, as you may remember, we stored your ma's things in our attic following her death. There wasn't much. And having sold out everything, our own stuff and yours combined, Henry has over a hundred dollars for you. But I realized that it wasn't right to sell your ma's album. You would want it, I said. And the chest, too. So here they are, Eddie. And while it isn't my intention to come between uncle and nephew, or stir up family discord, I would like to leave the thought with you that any time you want to make your home with us the doors are open to you."

"That's mighty kind of you," Eddie spoke earnestly. "But I imagine that this will be my home until I have one of my own."

"Are you going to be a farmer, Eddie?"

A farmer!

"No," the boy spoke quickly. "I'm going to be a salesman."

"A salesman! Did you hear that, Henry? Eddie says he's going to be a salesman. Well," came the fluent advice, "I hope you don't go around cheating people, like that cross-eyed scallawag who sold me my electric curling iron. It never has done the things for my hair that he promised. In fact, it isn't even dependable. And every time I use it—had you noticed, Eddie, that my hair is bobbed?—I'm on needles and pins for fear it will flare up and do to my hair

what it did to cousin Ella's when she used it on her last visit. Poor Ella! She went home the next day, madder than a wet hen. Nor has she written a line to me since. As though *I* were to blame. Henry said that on top of losing half of her hair she even singed her scalp. But he never could tell anything without making it sound worse than it really was."

Here Aunt Hattie bustled into sight.

"Even if you can't stay over night with us," the housewife smoothed the creases out of her clean apron, "I'm going to insist that you stay to supper. Nor will you have to wait long. For the potatoes are on cooking and the strawberry shortcake is in the oven."

There was merriment in the farmhouse that evening. The supper table groaned with its extra load of good things to eat. Throughout the meal the housewife and fleshy visitor kept up a running fire of conversation ranging from politics to home-made rag rugs. At the request of the others the returned college boy gave an interesting account of his past year's work, the loving mother beaming with pride as the story continued to its conclusion. Eddie did his share of the talking. He *was* glad, he told himself stoutly, that his cousin was home again—he wouldn't let any other thought enter his mind. And, further, he hoped that the other boy would get a good summer job in the Electro-Call plant.

Yet there were moments when he wanted to steal away by himself.

Having made arrangements to spend the night with relatives in a near-by town, the visitors drove away shortly after supper, the fleshy one's tongue running till the last moment, and the stooped one nodding. Invited to go to Sun Prairie with his cousin, Eddie declined, offering as an excuse that he was tired. Shortly after eight o'clock he went up to his room. Lighting a hand lamp on the dresser, he studied the calling card that the salesman had given to him. Then he slowly put the card away in a small box where other boyish treasures were kept—his mother's Bible; the watch his father had carried. Into this box he now put his parents' wedding picture, the album itself and accompanying chest of toys having been put away in a dark corner of the closet. Dropping onto the edge of the bed, with its showy home-made quilt, he slowly unlaced his shoes, letting them fall one after the other to the carpeted floor. Then in the same methodical way he got out of his pants and shirt, putting them away in the closet. He stood before the window in his night clothes for several minutes, listening to the plaintive call of an owl in the forest on the other side of the road. Then he blew out the lamp and got into bed.

At ten o'clock he still was wide awake. For his thoughts wouldn't let him go to sleep. The

familiar rattle of the farm truck came to him as it turned into the lane under his window. There was a care-free boyish whistle—a door slammed —feet stumbled on the stairs.

"Hey, Eddie," came in a heavy whisper.

"Yes?"

"Where's the matches?"

"Feel up and down the wall inside the door."

"I got 'em."

A feminine voice came up the stairs.

"Herbie."

"Yes, Ma."

"I left a light for you in the east bedroom."

"All right. I'll blow it out."

"Aren't you going to sleep there?"

"Not if Eddie will let me sleep with him." A cap sailed toward the bed. "How about it, old shoe polish?"

"Why . . . sure thing." Eddie sat up and rubbed his eyes. "I want you to," he added feelingly.

There was a low chuckle.

"Ma's funny. I bet a cookie she's been working all the afternoon in that east bedroom, dolling it up for me. And you should have heard her sputter when I started to town in the old truck. I guess she was ashamed of me." A paper rustled. "I got some new work clothes in town to-night. Want to see 'em, Eddie?"

"Sure thing."

The package was unwrapped.

"Overalls!" cried Eddie in surprise. And then, in his kind-hearted way, he was pained by the thought of how disappointed the other one must be. "Wouldn't they give you an office job?"

"An office job? *Me?*" and the speaker's merry laughter was pleasing to hear. "What do I want of an office job? Look me over, kid. A farmer, and nothing else but."

Eddie could only stare. And then, in sudden quietness, the other boy, partly undressed, came over and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Say, kid, Laura told me something about you to-night. You know—what you and the salesman talked about this afternoon. Gee, I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" echoed Eddie, with whirling thoughts.

"I never dreamed that you hated farm work. I don't think Dad suspected it, either. Or else he would have——"

"Oh!" cried Eddie in sudden misery. "Don't talk that way. Please. I don't hate it. I just let myself think so. I'm ashamed of myself."

"Good old pal!"

"Don't," and the voice choked. "If you knew how I have been feeling toward you——"

"Let me get my arm under you, Eddie. There. Gee, this is just like old times. We're good pals, eh? And we're always going to be good pals."

The light was blown out.

"Mr. Salzar wants you to come down to the factory to-morrow and see him, Eddie. He's interested in you from what that salesman told him about you." There was a quick change in the tone of the voice. *"Hey!* Who's got my pillow? Come across with it, you hunk of cheese, or I'll kick you through the ceiling."

CHAPTER VI

AUNT HATTIE'S "GHOST"

It isn't the nature of energetic growing boys to awaken at summer sunrise without being called, though in Eddie's case it may be stated to his credit that he seldom had to be called more than once. Deeply conscientious as well as innately ambitious, he was never unmindful of the duty he owed these hard-working relatives who had opened their home and hearts to him. Nor had he ever hinted to them that the imposed farm work was distasteful to him. The work had to be done. And manfully he had performed his just share of it.

But now, with a possibility of engaging in work more to his liking, how changed were his feelings! Every sound that came to him through the open bedroom window, the cracking of a twig, the scampering of flying squirrels on the shingled roof, the rasping chorus of garrulous katydids, all so distinctive of the countryside, filled him with added happiness. That plaintive call of the owl! Earlier he had let himself imagine that the lonely bird, like himself, was voicing its discontentment. Its song was one of

mingled sadness and rebellion. But now he found a new uplifting note in the repeated call. Pictures of living, growing things came into his mind. Like the owl and others of its kind, he was part of a vibrant, pulsing, creative world.

"When I was tied down to the farm I hated it," he thus spoke to himself in sensible philosophy. "But I don't hate it now. And even if I have to go back to farm work this fall I'm not going to hate it. Somehow I—I feel changed, about the farm and everything else. I don't know what came over me. But the change is there. And I'm the better for it."

Kept awake by his new-found happiness, he got up and dressed when the growing light of the new day, as it magically crimsoned the eastern sky, made discernible the familiar objects in his room. And very careful was he not to awaken his bedfellow. Good old Herb! The farm boy wondered at the mist in his eyes as he looked down at the well-formed, pleasing face of his sleeping cousin. Manliness and high ideals show. And Eddie saw only such qualities here. For a moment or two, as he stood there in the grip of emotion, he was strangely tempted to awaken the sleeper, to make sure of the other's promise that always they should share the same walks in life, chums as well as cousins, each helping the other, and both striving constantly for bigger and nobler things.

Mr. Garry heard his nephew's light step on the carpeted stairs. But before the farmer could get into his worn work clothes the boy was well started down the long lane that led to the cow pasture.

"Laws-a-me, Pa," the housewife spoke sleepily, having heard the kitchen door close lightly behind her nephew. "Whatever got into Eddie this morning to get up without being called?"

Mrs. Garry yawned.

"Eddie's a good boy," was the farmer's quiet comment, as he laced his heavy shoes.

"Of course. And I'm glad now that he and Herbie are going to sleep together. It was silly of me to think of putting Herbie in a separate room. But I didn't know—I thought maybe we'd find a big change in him. And naturally I wanted to fall in with his plans."

"Had you ever thought of renting our spare room, Ma?" the farmer then inquired, in his slow reflective way.

Aunt Hattie raised herself in bed.

"Renting our spare room?" she repeated, searching her husband's eyes, the sleep gone now from her own. "What do you mean?"

"We might get some tourist business if we put up a sign."

"But we're on a byroad."

"I was told last week by the road commissioners that the regular detour between Sun

Prairie and Ashford is going to pass our place while the new hard road is going in."

The woman sighed.

"Tourists seldom stop at places as shabby-looking as ours, Pa. You know that as well as I do. For they sensibly figure that the inside will look like the outside. Besides, we have no bath."

The farmer came over and sat down on the edge of the bed, seemingly more ungainly in his manner than usual.

"Hattie," he spoke listlessly, "I sometimes wish that you and I never had met. All I've brought you is poverty. We get poorer each succeeding year."

Capable soul that she was, Aunt Hattie quickly got the situation in hand.

"Look here, Pa," she spoke severely. "If you ever make another remark like that I'll box your ears. I will for a fact. The idea of you talking that way. And just when we have Herbie with us again. I married you because I loved you. And I still love you. You and the boys mean more to me than all the riches in the world. It does seem at times as though we have more than our just share of poverty. But the good Lord knows best. We're going to come out all right, Pa. I want you to believe that. For *I* believe it. No one can ever make me think that the Lord has forsaken us."

As was her regular custom, Aunt Hattie made the rounds of her prized flowers while breakfast was cooking. And on this particular morning she stepped from the dew-laden garden, with its tang of lush foliage and fragrant blossoms, into the road, from where she tried to picture the home that she had learned to love so dearly through the unemotional eyes of a tourist. The result was not encouraging.

"But we never know what we can do till we try," was her practical decision.

The two cousins playfully cuffed each other on their way from the barn to the house, from the back porch of which the call to breakfast had been sent out.

"When are you going to town to see Mr. Salzar?" Herb inquired.

"Right after breakfast."

"Are you acquainted with him, Eddie?"

"Not as well as you are."

"Well, don't be afraid of him. Talk to him the same as you would to Dad."

"Do you really think he'll give me a job, Herb?"

"Sell yourself to him," the other laughed. "You say you want to be a salesman. Here's a chance to prove what you can do."

Sell himself! Eddie had imaginatively pictured himself selling motor cars and various kinds of specialties. But he never had thought of sell-

ing himself. In a way, the idea startled and unnerved him. For he saw the possibility of failure. Still, what would a practical business man like Mr. Salzar expect to find in a boy just out of high school? Certainly, not wide experience in selling or any other line of work.

"If he likes my appearance, and I can make him realize how eager I am to work myself up, he'll give me a job," was the boy's sensible conclusion.

Right there Eddie struck at the heart of a great truth. And it will profit every growing schoolboy to stop here for a moment or two and think. The great world of Industry is constantly in need of new materials. Send us more iron and steel! Send us more men! Send us more boys! Such is the insistent cry. And of the great army of boys knocking at Industry's gates, who are the ones most eagerly received? The youth whose pasty face tells the story of fast living? Oh, no! The laggard who wasted his time in school, or, even worse, who refused to go to school? Oh, no! Men who hire boys read boys' minds and faces. Thus is youth appraised. And exactly as Eddie had mentally settled to his own satisfaction, personality is a thing that counts —the kind of a clear-eyed, straightforward personality that comes from clean living, right thinking and high ideals.

What is it the Boy Scout says in part in taking

his oath? "I will keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight." There you are! A boy's face may be covered with freckles; he may have a pug nose; he may be a runt or a bean-pole; but if he's clean in heart and spirit, it shows. Employers of boys are not deceived. Industry wants boys of promise—purposeful boys like Eddie Garry and Andy Blake —and little interest is shown in the boy who hadn't enough gumption to complete his high-school work. Industry is fast becoming specialized. And to compete with others of his kind, a boy, to succeed, must be equipped with the fundamentals supplied by the nation's great public-school system. Pity the uneducated young man, therefore, who, in his twenties, awakes to learn that the golden eggs are beyond his reach. He killed the goose in quitting school. Oh, if he could go back! If he could have those high-school days to live over again. But he can't go back—not one in a thousand goes back. There is a place in Industry for even the dullard. For there is need of strong backs as well as strong minds. But the plums go to the youthful workers who made the most of their opportunities in school; the boys who entered Industry eager to learn; and well equipped to learn.

There was further talk at the breakfast table about the suggested "tourist" sign, which the farmer agreed to make that morning.

"I'll paint it," offered Herb, wanting to share in the work.

Eddie was a generous boy. And the word "paint" having aroused a certain train of thoughts in his mind, he inquired enigmatically:

"Say, Aunt Hattie, if a wizard came along and offered to paint your house by a single stroke of his magic brush, what colors would you choose?"

"Laws-a-me!" cried the practical woman. "What a silly question."

"Would you like yellow and purple?"

"Oh, Eddie! Who but a boy would think of such a heathenish color combination as that?"

"Purple's pretty."

"Of course—but not for a house."

"Well, what's your choice?" the nephew pressed, to a secret purpose.

"White and green."

"White *would* look pretty," considered Herb, having in mind the surrounding foliage, a frame, as it were, for the house itself.

"It would take at least fifteen gallons of paint to make *this* house white," sighed the unenthused woman.

"That's only sixty dollars," said Eddie.

"*Only* sixty dollars. Laws-a-me! You talk like Henry Ford, himself."

"But if you *did* have sixty dollars to spare,

isn't it true, Aunt Hattie, that you'd buy house paint first of all?"

"Eddie, what are you driving at?"

"I'll soon be working in town," the nephew made quick use of his wits. "And I'll have to spend my money for something."

Aunt Hattie stared. Then she looked from her husband to her son.

"Now that I have a vacation," Herb spoke up, "I think it's only fair that I help Dad and thus give Eddie a chance to earn some money in town. Anyway, we've so settled it between us; and he's going to town this very morning to get a job."

Aunt Hattie had a noble spirit.

"I'm glad, Eddie," she showered her bright-eyed nephew with loving glances. "Somehow I have the feeling that you'll enjoy working in town for a change. And every cent that you earn is yours."

The boy's secret gave him great happiness.

"Won't you let me buy you some white paint, Aunt Hattie?" he grinned, thinking of the roll of bills that Mr. Brantingham had left with him.

"Not a pint," the words were spoken firmly. "First of all, I want you to buy a new suit. You're a nice-looking boy, Eddie; your uncle and I are very proud of you; and we are anxious to see you looking your best."

Paint, though, was a far more important item in Eddie's mind just then than a new suit. However, he wisely dropped the subject.

"By the way," Aunt Hattie inquired, alternately searching the boys' faces, "which of you two young scallawags was walking around the farmyard last night in your shirt-tail?"

"It was Eddie," laughed Herb, in his quick, nonsensical way.

"Aw! . . ."

"Were you downstairs last night, Eddie?"

"No."

"Don't let him stuff you, Ma," the college boy kept up the fun. "He's deep."

"How about yourself?" came the pointed question from the inquiring elder.

"Me?" In my shirt-tail? Why, Ma! I'm surprised that you should feel the need of asking such a question."

"It's generally conceded," Eddie put in maliciously, "that all college guys are nuts."

"Answer me," the woman then injected a sharper tone into her voice. "Were either of you two boys downstairs last night? Say yes or no."

"No," the pair spoke together.

"That's queer. I saw some one in white in the moonlit yard when I raised up in bed shortly after midnight. And when I got over the first silly thought that it was a ghost (I was half

asleep myself) I laid it to you boys. It was one of you in your long white nightshirt, I told myself."

A queer sound issued from the farmer's throat.

"This morning when I threw out feed to the chickens it seemed to me that fewer of them gathered around than usual. Do you suppose, Hattie, that the prowler you saw was a thief?"

"Land of Goshen!" cried the excitable woman. "I never thought of that."

Hurrying upstairs to change his clothes, wanting to look his best, Eddie found his aunt in tears upon his return to the kitchen. More than twenty young chickens were missing. The "ghost" was indeed a despicable thief.

"But how anybody could have the heart to steal from us, poor as we are, is beyond my comprehension," sobbed the discouraged farm woman. "And I worked so hard to raise those chickens. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! It does seem as though everything is against us."

This was not the first time that chicken thieves had visited the premises. Other farmers in the neighborhood had suffered similar losses.

But a chicken thief who disguised himself as a ghost! No wonder Eddie was bewildered.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW BOARDER

As a schoolboy Eddie had often passed the big plant of the Electro-Call Company, hoping that some day he, too, would be permitted to share in its industrial activities.

It was here that most of the local high-school graduates sought employment. And many of the town's youth had made marked advancement. Without conceit, Eddie felt that he could do the same.

But the chance had been denied him.

Now, though, the cherished dream was about to be realized. And great indeed was the boy's inward happiness as he stopped in front of the main office.

Eddie Garry, factory boy! That was a million times more pleasing to him than Eddie Garry, farmer. Still, he wouldn't always be a factory boy. For his main interest lay not in manufacturing but in selling.

"I don't know how they work it," was the thought in his mind, as he gave his clothes final critical inspection before entering the office, be-

yond the open door of which he could hear a battery of clicking typewriters. "But they probably have some kind of a definite scheme of making junior salesmen out of factory boys. Certainly, I'll be only too glad to do what they say, even to scrubbing the floors."

Oh, Eddie! You indeed had the right spirit.

The girl at the information desk recognized the young visitor, having graduated a year ahead of him. He was much better looking, she thought, as she swiftly appraised his personal appearance with critical feminine eyes, though a trifle too sun-browned. And how neat he appeared, with his carefully pressed trousers and polished shoes. She didn't know, though, that the young applicant had left his suit coat at home because he had outgrown it. His need of a suit was no idle fancy of his aunt's.

Having stated his errand, Eddie nervously shifted his weight from one sturdy leg to the other as he listened to the conversation between the switchboard operator and the company's chief executive.

Then another old schoolmate breezed into sight.

"Hi," greeted Morris Hebby, an exuberant youth. "What's on your mind?—a job?"

Eddie nodded, wishing that the other boy had spoken in lower tones. For it seemed to the em-

barrassed young visitor that a thousand pairs of amused eyes were directed at him from various sections of the general office room.

And how awkward he felt when he later crossed this big room to the indicated door of the general manager's private office. Once he stubbed his toe against the leg of a typewriter desk. Strangely, though, none of the typists tittered, as he had expected them to do. As a matter of fact, the office employees were paying a great deal less attention to him than he imagined.

Howard Salzar had spent a fortune on his factory. For he liked to combine the practical with the beautiful. And the result showed in the contentment and loyalty of his working people.

"I have no right to ask men and women to work for me in surroundings any the less pleasing than their own homes," was his expressed philosophy. And so he had built up a great industrial "home," carefully lighted and ventilated, with every possible working convenience, surrounded in season by well-kept lawns (open to all the employees during rest periods) and gorgeous flower gardens. The Electro-Call plant, in fact, was one of the show places of the town. And the gray-haired, kindly-faced man who now rose to greet the youthful caller, who faltered in the doorway of his office, was justly proud of his work.

"Well, Eddie," the conversation quickly took

a business turn, when the two were seated, the elder very much pleased with the younger one's general appearance, and the latter a bit dazed by the luxury of his immediate surroundings, "I hear some mighty fine reports about you. As you can imagine, we're always in need of the right kind of boys here. And particularly are we pleased to get in touch with boys who are interested in selling. For ours is a distinctly selling proposition. . . . I assume that you have a high-school diploma."

"Yes, sir," Eddie found his voice.

"We seldom hire a boy who hasn't. . . . What subjects did you specialize in?"

These were named in order.

"Do you like machinery?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most boys do. . . . Have you ever been through our factory?"

"No, sir."

"Well, as you may know, we specialize in electrical signaling units—paging and interior fire-alarm systems, watchmen's recording systems, and the like. A strictly technical product. If we were to hire you, with the thought of working you out in the field later on, I dare say our sales manager would expect you to spend at least a year in the plant, familiarizing yourself with our line and processes. Are you willing to start in at the very beginning?"

Eddie was, and said so.

"In fact, if you don't start me in at the beginning," he spoke with pleasing boyish candor, "I'm afraid I won't be of much use to you."

"How old are you?" the executive then inquired.

"Seventeen."

"You're a big boy for your age. You'd easily pass for eighteen; or even nineteen. Laura speaks very highly of you."

Eddie blushed. And more favorably impressed still by the youth's appearance, the very human executive found difficulty in withholding a smile. As for the young applicant himself, great indeed would have been his confusion could he have known the full extent of the praise that the warm-hearted girl had accorded him. "Oh, Daddy," she had told her amused parent. "He's perfectly *adorable.* And so *modest.* If you hire him, don't be surprised if you find me on the pay-roll, too. For I'm perfectly *crazy* over him. Alas, though, he's too wrapped up in big ideas to notice a mere girl like me."

Mr. Salzar wanted boys who were "wrapped up in big ideas." So, when Eddie left the office that morning, it was understood that he was to report for work the following Monday.

Turning into Main Street, the driver parked his truck in front of the town's leading hardware store, from the main door of which he

and a clerk later carried five three-gallon cans of white paint and three two-gallon cans of green paint. Also he bought two big brushes, for surface painting, and a smaller brush for trimming. His list of purchases further included a supply of painter's oil, for it was explained to him by the experienced dealer that the paint would need thinning down for the first coat, thus permitting the oil to soak into the wood; and other treatment was recommended for places where the surface to be covered was badly weathered.

Aunt Hattie was overcome with emotion when it was explained to her that the paint unloaded on the side porch of the farmhouse had been paid for out of money that the starry-eyed nephew had received from the sale of his mother's furniture.

"You shouldn't have done it, Eddie," she repeated over and over again, as she dabbed at her eyes with the hem of her apron. But deep in her motherly heart she was glad that he had done it. For she loved him dearly. And it pleased her to know that he took this interest in his home.

And what a pleasing home it would be, she visualized, with its snow-white walls and dark-green trimming. Surely the morning's suggested money-making scheme was no longer a vain hope.

There were ladders on the farm. And that afternoon Eddie and his cousin set to work, suit-

able old clothing having been laid out for them.

"Do you expect to finish the job by the end of the week?" Herb inquired, as the work progressed.

"If we don't," returned Eddie, "you and Uncle Alex will have to finish it yourselves. For I'm going to work in the factory next Monday morning."

"Hip, hip hurray!" cheered Herb. And then a sound scolding was administered to the young painters by their elder as they began flipping paint at each other, Herb evidently feeling that some such boyish antic as this was necessary to properly celebrate his cousin's first "selling" victory.

The finished sign having been mounted conspicuously on the front fence, Mr. Garry took complete charge of the farm work. And so the boys were privileged to give their undivided attention to the painting job.

"It's going to look beautiful," Aunt Hattie told them that evening. And then, as though to further express her appreciation, she drew the paint-spattered nephew into her motherly arms. "Oh, Eddie," she cried. "What a good boy you are. No wonder we all love you."

Grinning, Eddie ran a sticky green finger over her nose. And later, when the others laughed at her, she playfully took after them, her husband included, chasing them out of the house

with a broom. Such happiness the farmhouse had not known in years.

And now an added element of mystery enters into our story.

"Somebody was peeping in our windows last night," Herb told his cousin, when the boys resumed work the following morning.

Eddie gave a peculiar laugh when shown the two hand prints on the freshly-painted sitting-room window-sill.

"Maybe it was Aunt Hattie's ghost," he volunteered.

"By George!" cried Herb, with sudden excitement. "I never thought of that."

Told about the peculiar hand prints on the window-sill, the unnerved farm woman, at her son's suggestion, hastened into the barnyard to check up on her feathered stock, later reporting a further loss of approximately ten young fowls.

"Such daring!" she cried, her eyes betraying the agitated state of her mind. "It seems almost unbelievable. Certainly, I never dreamed that the thief would come here two nights in succession."

It was settled in Eddie's reflective mind that there was something decidedly queer about the midnight visitor. In the first place, instead of trying to work unseen, after the established manner of his kind, he had openly paraded across the moonlit barnyard. Even more surprising, he

had worn a long white robe of some sort. Now there was evidence that he had been window peeping. Could it be, Eddie asked himself, in a queer turn of his thoughts, that the prowler was principally concerned with playing ghost? But what rational man or woman would do a thing like that? And what could be the motive for such a ridiculous act?

Agreeing to stand guard that night with his cousin, Eddie was convinced that strange disclosures would follow the thief's arrest. In a way he looked forward to the proposed night's work. For it was adventure of a sort. And boys are inherently fond of adventure. Yet, strangely, he was uneasy.

That afternoon the two painters ran out of oil. So Eddie got into the truck and hurried off to town where the necessary purchase was made. Upon his return to the farmhouse he found one of the porch chairs occupied by a young man whose eyes, concealed behind huge colored glasses, curiously followed the truck as it turned into the lane. Not then did the young farmer suspect that the glasses were a disguise. But he was soon to learn strange things.

Aunt Hattie was in high feather.

"Can you imagine it, Eddie," she spoke happily to her young nephew, when he tiptoed into the kitchen to question her, "we've got a boarder already. His name is Horace Hunter; and he's

a botanist. I saw him walking down the road, carrying a grip. 'Now,' says I to myself, 'who can that be?' He stopped when he came to our new sign. Then, having scrutinized the house, he came to the side door, where I was ironing, asking me if he could secure board here as well as a room. He was making a study of ferns, he said, and probably would be in the immediate neighborhood for several weeks. For goodness' sake, Eddie! Quit peeking at him. I know he looks funny, with those big tortoise-shell glasses. But he might not stay here if he caught us grinning at him. Remember, young man, that he's paying us ten dollars a week."

CHAPTER VIII

MYSTERY

"LAWS-A-ME!" the farm woman spoke across the supper table to the new boarder, who already had been secretly nicknamed the Owl by the amused cousins. "You aren't eating enough to keep a sparrow alive. Won't you let me help you to another dish of peas?"

Motherly soul that she was, and generous to the core, Aunt Hattie was never able to quiet the foolish fear that her family was liable to starve to death, notwithstanding her strenuous efforts to provide ample prepared food. And particularly zealous was she in attending to the wants (real and fancied) of her guests. On such occasions she exhibited many of the characteristics of her brood hens.

"No?" she spoke with noticeable disappointment, when the boarder declined to relinquish his empty pea dish. "Then let me help you to more meat and potatoes."

"I've had a great plenty, thank you."

"But you *must* make out a meal. Still," the concerned face brightened, "I can give you a

HE STOPPED WHEN HE CAME TO OUR NEW SIGN.

double helping of shortcake, if you are as fond of dessert as most boys."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Garry. But I assure you that a single helping will be sufficient."

Stilted words truly, thought Eddie. Then, as the meal continued, he found himself wondering, in mounting curiosity, why the big colored glasses so frequently turned in his direction.

"Either I look as freakish to him as he does to me," was the farm boy's conclusion. "Or he's peculiarly studying me."

Aunt Hattie enjoyed company. She enjoyed getting up big meals. And particularly did she enjoy the conversation that accompanied these meals. For conversation is usually informative. And human nature, whether presented to her in the form of a learned elder or an unsophisticated youth, invariably piqued the farm woman's curiosity.

"I wouldn't care to live," she was wont to remark in the privacy of her family, "if I couldn't find out things."

Now, as she further engaged the new boarder in conversation, open curiosity was pictured in her eyes.

"I imagine," she began, hoping to draw the other out, "that you and Herbie are about the same age."

Having been introduced to the various mem-

bers of the family, the Owl, of course, knew who "Herbie" was.

"I am twenty," the words were spoken with marked gravity.

Which brought Herb himself into the conversation.

"College man?" he inquired briefly.

"No," the Owl gravely shook his head.

"I've had two years at Purdue," Herb informed proudly. "Just got home yesterday."

"Mr. Garry and I have been wondering where your home is," Aunt Hattie gave the visitor further chance to disclose his personal affairs.

There was a brief silence.

"I have no home," the newcomer finally vouchsafed, in his habitual grave manner.

Did this mean that he was an orphan? The farm woman so took it. And at once her motherly instincts were aroused.

"You poor dear!" she spoke feelingly. "We can all sympathize with you. For Eddie, too, is an orphan."

Their eyes meeting, the elder of the two parentless boys inquired:

"Have you been living here long?"

"About four years."

"And before that . . . ?"

A noticeable eagerness accompanied the uncompleted yet comprehensive sentence.

"I lived in Weston, Ohio."

"Eddie's pa died first," Aunt Hattie hastened into an account of the orphaned nephew's private affairs, reticence being an unknown part of her make-up. "And following his ma's death—pass Mr. Hunter the toothpicks, Herbie—he lived with a family by the name of Brantingham. Not, however," the explanation was quickly annexed, "that we didn't want him to live with us—but the news of his ma's death never reached us until four months after her burial."

Again the big glasses were turned on the younger farm boy.

"Was your mother laid to rest beside your father?"

Which, Eddie thought, was a peculiar question. Then, as a vision arose in his mind of shattered railroad coaches and mangled bodies, he abruptly got to his feet and left the room, unwilling to make a public show of his emotions.

Nor did Aunt Hattie continue the subject. For Eddie's moods always disturbed her. And she saw now that the inquisitive boarder had carried his inquiries too far.

"I wish he'd quit boring holes into me with those hidden eyes of his," Eddie later complained to his relatives. "He gives me the fidgets."

Aunt Hattie was a trustful soul.

"He's interested in you," was her practical view.

"Yes," Herb volunteered the information, in

his merry way, "and I know some one else who's interested in you, too."

Eddie quickly sought his cousin's eyes, little dreaming that the other boy was referring to the attractive heiress of the Salzar fortunes.

Eddie's curiosity was aroused.

"Who do you mean?" came the natural inquiry.

"As though I'd tell," laughed Herb.

The cousins then got into the old truck and hurried away to the swimming hole in the hollow where they were joined by other lads from the neighborhood. The fun continued until dark, the group then breaking up, part going one way and part another.

Aunt Hattie met the returned swimmers in the kitchen door.

"Did you see anything of Mr. Hunter on the road?" she inquired.

"No," Herb shook his head, the glossy hair of which still showed the affects of its recent immersion.

"He came downstairs shortly after you boys left. And when I told him that you had gone swimming, he started off in that direction."

Later the young botanist came home with an armful of ferns, reporting that he, too, had stopped in the darkened hollow for a brief swim.

"To-morrow night," said Herb, in whom col-

lege life had developed many companionable characteristics, "we'll all go together."

And Eddie found himself wondering curiously what the Owl would look like without his colored glasses.

When told that the two cousins were planning to stand guard in the moonlit barnyard, Aunt Hattie experienced a thousand hysterical fears. And her words of counsel were many and scattered, to all of which Eddie and Herb listened with a patient smile. Then, to the surprise of the farm boys, the new boarder offered to share in the proposed vigil. So at eleven o'clock the three guards armed themselves with stout clubs and sought separate hiding places, Eddie in the wood pile, Herb behind the smoke house and the Owl behind the corn crib.

"Lay low until he enters the hen house," Herb gave the others final instructions bearing on the thief's capture, "then close in on him."

"Is there a reward for the first one who cracks him over the head?" the Owl spoke with more true boyishness than the cousins gave him credit for, as he ran his fingers up and down the handle of his weapon.

"Well," said Herb, "if you do lay him out with your club, you can depend on it that you'll get your name in the local newspaper."

Eddie was still obsessed by peculiar thoughts.

"We'll get a shock," said he, "if the thief turns out to be one of our own neighbors."

"I'd sooner think it's some scallawag from town," Herb gave as his opinion.

"But what's his idea in playing ghost?"

"He wants to do the job up artistically, I guess."

Reflecting on the peculiar mystery, as he lay in the wood pile, Eddie was led to the sensible conclusion that the thief would be most unlikely to return to the scene three nights in succession. Only a simpleton would do that; and much less than being simpletons, thieves, as a rule, were sharp-witted.

But had they an ordinary thief to cope with? Eddie felt not. Undoubtedly possessed of keener intelligence than others of his kind, the prowler seemed to have no regard whatsoever for matters of form. And it was this exceptional daring of his—his utter disregard for the rules of the game—that made him particularly dangerous.

Eddie therefore prepared himself for exceptional developments. Nor was he disappointed. For at midnight a tall, white-robed figure came into sight around a corner of the barn.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," cried the startled boy in a quivering voice.

Crossing the open barnyard, now bathed in the bright light of a full moon, the ghost moved with swift gliding steps in the direction of the

poultry house. With the flowing white robe and outstretched hands, a more fearsome spectacle could hardly be imagined. Eddie in spite of himself experienced a chill of fear.

Crouched in the shadow of the smoke house, Herb signaled to his cousin. Then, as the ghost opened the door of the poultry house and disappeared inside, the two boys quickly left their hiding places and started across the farmyard on the run.

As though aware of the trap set for him, and fully prepared, the thief, darting from the poultry house, disappeared in a flash behind the adjacent corn crib. There was an ear-splitting, agonized scream. And when Herb and Eddie turned the corner of the building, they found their new comrade lying on the ground, blood oozing from a gash in his forehead.

Herb ran on, calling to Eddie to stop and care for the stricken one. But all trace of the ghost was lost. Had he been capable of dissolving into thin air, in true ghostly form, he couldn't have effected a more complete disappearance. It was baffling.

Having heard the commotion, Aunt Hattie and her husband got quickly out of bed. The thief, they were told, had come and gone, the efforts of the guards to apprehend him having failed. Even worse, one of the watchers had been struck down by the escaping law breaker.

Later Eddie raced to town in the old truck for a doctor. And then for many days the injured youth lay in a coma. The attending physician seemed unwilling to commit himself to a direct statement bearing on the probable outcome of the case. But it was adjudged from his vague words and grave manner that the patient was liable to suffer a more or less permanent loss of memory.

During these eventful days Eddie seemed strangely drawn to the invalid, who, without his disfiguring glasses, was seen to be a handsome round-faced youth of ruddy complexion.

"He came to see me," the farm boy told himself over and over again. "There was something he wanted to ask me—something he wanted to find out. And his big glasses were a disguise."

Strangely, these glasses had disappeared. The farm boys searched high and low for them. But to no success. So the conclusion was drawn that the thief had picked them up in his continued flight.

Warned that a peculiar thief was at work in the neighborhood, the farmers grimly loaded their guns with buckshot and otherwise sought to apprehend the law breaker. There was a week or two of feverish excitement and conjecture. But as nothing developed, quiet again settled over the usually peaceful neighborhood.

In the meantime Eddie had gone to work in

the factory. Glowing indeed were the reports that he brought home. Yet constantly he seemed to be touched by uneasiness bordering on depression.

On the night of the tragedy he had uncovered a most bewildering secret. But with the loyalty so common among boys he had said nothing about his discoveries to his relatives, preferring to let the stricken one, upon his recovery, speak for himself.

But the doctor's worst fears were realized. The patient's brown eyes never regained their natural luster. Nor could the convalescent remember his name, or the slightest thing pertaining to his history.

"Horace Hunter? No," he shook his head, "that isn't my name."

Aunt Hattie was greatly perturbed.

"But that is the name you gave us."

"No," the patient further shook his head. "My name isn't Horace Hunter."

"Is your name Alfred?" Eddie inquired, when permitted to talk with the patient.

"Alfred?" the name was given consideration. "No-o."

"Alexander?"

"No-o."

"Arthur?"

"I—I feel dizzy. I can't think. It hurts me to think."

Then, when the patient was further along the road to recovery, Eddie tried him again, having secured a list of masculine Christian names starting with the letter "a."

"Is your name Aaron?"

"No-o."

"Abel?"

"No-o."

"Abner?"

"No-o."

"Abraham?"

"No-o."

"Adam?"

"No-o."

"Adolph?"

"No-o."

"Albert?"

"No-o."

"Algernon?"

"No-o."

"Alvin?"

"No-o."

"Ambrose?"

"No-o."

"Amos?"

"No-o."

"Andrew?"

"Andrew!" the name was repeated excitedly, as the patient struggled to repair the shattered

wheels of his memory. "Andrew! Andy! Andy!"

And there Eddie stopped.

The doctor came to pay his final call, finding the patient in a cushioned chair on the front porch.

"Well, Horace," came the jovial inquiry, "how is your head feeling this morning?"

Aunt Hattie quickly sought the physician's ear.

"He says his name is Andy."

"Andy, eh? Andy what?"

"He doesn't know, sir."

"Can't you remember your surname, Andy?" the inquiry was couched in kindly tones.

"No-o, sir," the boy slowly shook his head.

"Nor where you came from?"

"No-o, sir."

"The poor lamb," Aunt Hattie leaned over the chair. "My heart bleeds for him."

"An operation might restore his memory," the physician later spoke to the farm woman in private. "For miracles are being performed on operating tables. But that is a matter for later consideration. For the present he needs nothing so much as rest and quiet, his brain having suffered a severe shock. . . . Did you ever find out who struck him down?"

"No, sir."

"Queer," the doctor spoke reflectively.

"Eddie thinks it was a crazy man."

The physician reflectively stroked his chin.

"Speaking of Eddie, Mrs. Garry, had you—ah—noticed any special resemblance between your nephew and this unknown boy?"

The woman stared.

"Why, doctor! . . . What do you mean?"

"If you'll study the boys' faces, Mrs. Garry, you'll find that their eyes are very much alike, not only in color but expression. Then they have the same hair and forehead."

The woman was aghast.

"But Eddie has no relatives except us."

The doctor shrugged.

"I merely mentioned it. . . . Don't forget to keep me posted on the case, Mrs. Garry. It holds my deepest interest. And I want to follow it closely."

That night the farm woman closeted herself with her husband. But the probabilities that they touched on, as they sought to explain the marked resemblance between the two boys, was so horrifying to them, and so nearly denuded the dead of its cloak of decency, that they locked the secret in their breasts, agreeing never to speak of it again.

But they felt obliged now, poor as they were, to give the stricken youth a permanent home. And they even talked of the possibility of a later operation.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING CONVENTION

AFTER ten weeks of steady absorbing work in the factory of the Electro-Call Company, Eddie was as determined as ever to become a salesman. And now, of course, in having lived with Electro-Call products for ten happy weeks, his greatest ambition was to be an Electro-Call salesman.

One morning in the close of August word was passed through the busy plant that all of the company's thirty-odd salesmen and branch managers were coming to the home office to attend an important sales conference. New equipment had been perfected by the engineering staff, and it was the company's plan to have all of its salesmen present when the first complete system was set up and demonstrated. Thus the collective field force would be given a chance to familiarize itself with the electrical and mechanical details of the new units; and while the men were together the sales and advertising departments could effectively present comprehensive selling plans, outlining the logical markets for the new equipment, and explaining how the company was planning, with advertising and sales helps, to co-op-

erate with its field men in reaching these markets.

A big fall drive! Some of the older workmen, who had grown up with the company, laughed scornfully when they heard that the ambitious management was making year-end plans for a million dollars' worth of business. But in listening to the factory gossip Eddie Garry didn't laugh. If only given the chance, he felt quite sure that he could go out into the field and sell a million dollars' worth of stuff himself!

"Oh, boy, but our factory is a busy place," he enthusiastically told his cousin one evening at the supper table. "The engineering department is rushing to get the new sprinkler supervisory system set up for demonstration; and there's about a hundred committees at work."

Herb grinned at his warm-faced younger relative.

"What committee are you on?" he inquired nonsensically. "The whisk-broom brigade?"

"*Me?* Oh, I'm the official sweeper and duster in the testing department," laughed Eddie, naming the department in which he worked as a junior tester. "The boss told me to-day that everything in our room had to be spick and span by Thursday morning. Such were his orders from the main office, he said."

"Do they go to all that extra work just on account of the visiting salesmen?" spoke up Aunt Hattie, from the head of the table.

Eddie nodded.

"Bu-lieve me, they turn the plant upside-down for the salesmen. For those are the birds with the real jobs. Sometimes, on just one order, a salesman will earn a commission of a thousand dollars or more. But it takes brains to get these orders. Stuff like ours is hard to sell. That is why Mr. Salzar told me the day he hired me that the business is strictly a selling proposition. Without top-notch salesmen it wouldn't survive a month."

Mr. Garry had been listening to the conversation with an attentive ear.

"Do you seem to be any nearer to a selling job, Eddie, than when you started in last June?" the farmer inquired in his grave way.

The warm glow departed from the factory boy's face as his eyes fell on the vacant chair at the foot of the table. Then, as though by an effort, he lifted himself from his momentary depression.

"Shucks! They wouldn't put me on the road before I'm twenty-one. Look at Harley Bagley. He's been trying for four years to get outside. The sales manager keeps telling him: 'Wait! Wait! Don't get impatient.'" There was a merry laugh. "Golly Ned! Can you imagine what Old Friday would say to *me* if I hit him for a selling job, after only ten weeks' factory experience? Say, he'd throw a fit."

"Who is Old Friday?" Aunt Hattie wanted to know.

"Mr. Fish, the sales manager. You know him. He's the big bug who lives in that swell brick house at the corner of Church and Cherry."

"But why do you call him Old Friday?"

"Because on Friday," laughed Eddie, "we always get fish."

"I swan!" cried Aunt Hattie. "What boys won't think of."

"I bet you don't call him Old Friday to his face," Herb put in.

"I was in his office the other day," Eddie went on. "And does he have everything swell! Why," came the boyish exaggeration, "his mahogany desk is as big as this whole room."

"Oh," drawled Herb, "I guess not that big."

"Well," grinned Eddie, "it's the biggest desk I ever saw. He had Harley Bagley look up an order for me. *Snappy?* Say, he sure knows how to make his clerks step around."

"He must be a very capable executive," nodded Mr. Garry, "for he has held the position of sales manager for the past ten years. And see how the company has grown!"

"Oh, he's got the goods, all right. But he isn't the kind of a man you can warm up to. He sort of makes you feel that you mustn't get too close to him. Everybody in the factory likes Mr. Salzar the better of the two."

Aunt Hattie had been thinking.

"Didn't you tell me the other day that there's a boy in your department by the name of Fish?"

Eddie nodded.

"Poor Fish, as we call him, isn't much like his father. He's all right. You can sure have fun with him."

"What a name," cried Aunt Hattie.

"He's a 'poor fish,' all right," laughed Herb, "as he proved last fall when he meandered down to college. Thought he was heading into a glorious adventure. But with real work to do he didn't last very long."

"I don't hold that against him," said Eddie loyally.

"How's he getting along in the factory?"

"Oh, all right."

"I suppose they're shoving him along to try and make a salesman of him."

Eddie nodded.

"He got a slip from the office this afternoon, notifying him that he was on the decoration committee. And to-morrow morning he's got to chase around the country and find four dozen orange pumpkins."

"For pies?" inquired Aunt Hattie quickly, thinking to herself what an awful job it would be to bake pumpkin pies for such a big crew of men.

"No, for decoration purposes. The entertainment committee is getting up an old-fashioned

barn dance, to be held at Mr. Salzar's stock farm, and the pumpkins are to be used, with corn shocks, for decorations. I thought I'd laugh my head off when Poor Fish got his slip. He's a comical kid, anyway. And the look that came over his face! He wanted to know what in heck an orange pumpkin was. We told him it was a pear-shaped pumpkin with a pit like a prune."

"I never heard of orange pumpkins," declared the capable housewife, puzzling her culinary brain.

"As I understand it," said Eddie, "there are two kinds of pumpkins—yellow and orange. And Mr. Fish thinks that the orange-colored ones will look the nicest."

"He must be a fussy old gink," grunted Herb, to whom pumpkins were pumpkins.

"*Is* he? Everything has got to be so-so to suit him."

The conversation continuing, the talkative factory boy told about the woodland camp that was being prepared for the visiting salesmen. Tents had been rented, small ones for sleeping purposes and a big one for general assembly. In previous years the convention guests had been quartered at the local hotel, but it was thought by the management that the important visitors would enjoy being in the open for a change. A sort of brief camping party. Starting Thursday

at ten o'clock, and continuing through Friday and Saturday, morning and afternoon business sessions were to be held in the assembly tent, with regular hours for lively recreation. Thursday evening there was to be a huge camp fire, to which all of the factory men had been invited. The barn dance was to be held on Friday night. Saturday evening would find the most of the important visitors on their way home.

"I sure am looking forward to Thursday night," Eddie concluded, with a happy face. "It's going to be fun at the camp fire. For the salesmen will tell stories. And I'll learn how they act when they get together."

Herb gave his cousin a quizzical look.

"I suppose you're anxious to see Mr. Halliday again."

Eddie's eyes danced.

"Gee! I can hardly wait."

"Maybe he'll offer you a job," laughed Herb.

"Oh, I guess not. He may take on Harley Bagley, though. Harley told me so confidentially. He saw a letter that Mr. Halliday had written to the sales manager."

"And who'll get Bagley's job?"

Eddie shrugged.

"Poor Fish, I suppose."

"But weren't you in the testing department ahead of him?" spoke up Aunt Hattie.

"Sure thing. But he'll get first chance."

"Why? Because his father's an executive in the company?"

Eddie nodded.

"I don't think that's fair," cried Aunt Hattie.

"Poor Fish is all right," Eddie spoke loyally; and whatever his inner feelings were in the matter he kept them carefully concealed.

When the evening chores were done, Herb as usual hurried away to the neighborhood swimming hole. But Eddie hung around the farmhouse.

"Say, Aunt Hattie."

"Well?" the dish washer inquired, as she hurried to put an end to her day's work.

"Did Mrs. Barlow say when she'd be home?"

"No."

"What was her object in taking Andy to town this afternoon?"

"The Barlows are very good neighbors, Eddie. They sympathize with us in our misfortunes, Andy's included. And I dare say that Mrs. Barlow thought that a trip to town would do the boy good."

"But he may get lost."

The dishes clattered in the pan.

"Don't be silly. Andy isn't helpless. Besides, you know as well as I do that Mrs. Barlow will give him the best of care. He's as safe with her as he is with us."

"What did you ever do with his money, Aunt Hattie?"

"Your uncle and I deposited it in the bank."

"How much was there?"

"A little over a hundred and sixty dollars."

"Will that pay for the operation?"

"If not," the farm woman took an indirect way of answering the question, "we'll have to make up the difference ourselves."

"I was going to suggest that you let me help," Eddie spoke eagerly.

"Dr. Crow says that it will be best to wait till winter."

"I'd give anything," the nephew spoke emotionally, "if I could help Andy recover his memory. Did—did it ever occur to you, Aunt Hattie," then came guardedly, "that there might be something queer about him coming here under an assumed name?"

The woman had steeled herself against all such probable questions.

"You have no proof, Eddie," she hurried with her work, "that his name isn't Horace Hunter."

"He says his name is Andy."

"Andy what?"

"That's all he can remember."

For the past three or four weeks Eddie and Andy had been sleeping together, Herb having agreed to take the other boy's room. Nor had Aunt Hattie objected to the arrangement. Yet

there were moments when she was deeply stirred as she watched the growing affection between the two boys.

"Oh!" was her secret thought. "Can it be true? Can it be true?"

A car drove into the lane at eight-thirty. Having gone to his room to write a letter, Eddie heard the sound of voices, chief among them his aunt's; then a pair of feet clattered boyishly on the stairs.

"Hi," cried Andy, as he burst into the room.

Eddie's eyes were warm.

"What's the matter, did you and Mrs. Barlow have a flat tire?"

"We were over to—to— I forget the name of the town."

"Sun Prairie?" volunteered Eddie.

"No-o."

"Ashford?"

"Yes," Andy's face lit up. "That's it. Mrs. Barlow took me over there to supper. And do you know, Eddie, it—it seemed to me that I had been there before. I don't know— Isn't it queer I can't remember?"

"Your memory will all come back some day, Andy. So don't let it worry you. And until you're able to take care of yourself I'll look out for you. But don't ever go to town alone."

"Say, Eddie, why doesn't Uncle Alex let me help him with the farm work?"

"The doctor said you're to keep quiet."

"But look at me!" the speaker spread his arms. "I'm as strong as an ox."

And indeed no one could have presented a more perfect picture of physical health. But the eyes! As they met his, Eddie winced. And instinctively his hand sought the other's shoulder.

"I can milk cows," Andy boasted.

"I wouldn't, if I were you. For the doctor knows best."

Later when the boys got ready for bed, Eddie took from the bottom drawer of his dresser a shirt across the front of which was a bar of green paint.

Paint, it might be added, that matched the trimming of the farmhouse!

Looking at his companion, Eddie asked:

"And you have no recollection of coming here in the dark and peeping in our sitting-room window?"

"No-o," Andy shook his head. "As I told you last night——"

"Think hard. You surely must remember this shirt. See! It has your initial on the sleeve. That is how I knew that your name began with 'a.'"

Night after night Eddie thus sought to revive the stunned mind, which was the main reason why he had arranged to have Andy sleep with him. And in doing his part, the latter's strug-

gles to force ajar the jammed doors of his memory were often pitiful.

"I—I can't remember the shirt, Eddie."

"Nor why you came here?"

"No-o."

"Wasn't it to see me, Andy? Didn't you want to ask me something? And wasn't the big glasses that you wore a disguise?"

"I—I don't remember."

"You asked me at the supper table about my mother—if she and my father were buried together. Do you remember that?"

"No-o."

"I never told the others, Andy, but it wasn't the chicken thief who peeped into our sitting-room window. It was you, as this shirt that I found in your room proves. You came here on some kind of a secret errand; and I'm still convinced that it concerns me. Look in the mirror, Andy! Don't you see, kid—we're as alike as two peas. We're related to each other. And in coming here *you* knew what that relationship was. Did you come to find me, Andy?—to bring me some strange news about yourself or myself?"

The other boy seemed spellbound by his reflection.

"Yes; yes," he panted, in the grip of sudden excitement, as he clutched his head with his hands. "It was you that brought me here. I came and looked in the window . . . I got against the

painted window-sill . . . then the next day I came back. I wanted to talk with you. I—I—Oh, Eddie! I can remember that much. But the rest is a blank."

Eddie's rickety truck was a standing joke at the factory. The workmen told the likeable country boy that they could hear him when he started from home in the morning. But it is doubtful if a shiny new car would have given the young factory worker half the fun that he got out of the wabbly truck. For even with his big dreams he was in every way a real boy at heart.

Rattling down one of Sun Prairie's principal streets the following morning between the hours of six and seven, he was hailed by a tall, genial-looking boy on the sidewalk.

"Hello, Country Jake."

"Hello, Poor Fish."

"How's the Rolls-Rough this morning?"

"Lovely. Hop in."

"Give me a hand, kid. I feel kind of weak."

"Toot! Toot!" laughed Eddie. "Here we go."

"Hold up, you big nut."

"Well," grinned the young driver, as the other boy scrambled into the truck, "have you got track of any orange pumpkins yet?"

Poor Fish laughed in his characteristic free and easy way. And to see him in this mood one could readily comprehend why he was so popu-

lar with his associates, both inside and outside of the factory.

"Orange pumpkins, your granny," he made himself comfortable. "I'll stop at the first pumpkin field I come to and load up."

"But what'll your father say?"

"*Him?* Shucks! He'll never know the difference. He's got too many other things to think about."

Eddie shrugged thoughtfully.

"I think you ought to try and find the kind of pumpkins he wants."

"Oh, that's just a finicky notion of his."

"I bet you'd do it if Mr. Salzar told you to."

"Maybe."

"When are you going after the pumpkins?"

"As soon as I can get the light factory truck."

Eddie grinned.

"You can take my truck," he offered generously.

"No, thanks," drawled Poor Fish. "I'd sooner wait an hour and get the factory truck. I know I'll get home then."

There was a glorious tang in the morning air. And the warm unshadowed sun gave promise of an ideal late-summer day.

"You're lucky," Eddie told the other boy, as they rang in at the time office. "Nothing to do but ride up and down the sunny countryside, in kingly style, while I have to sweep the dirty old

test-room floor. And I suppose the boss will come around with a spyglass in search of dust specks."

"Never mind," laughed Poor Fish. "We'll both be star salesmen some day."

"You tell 'em!" cried Eddie. "You and me, kid; and me and you."

CHAPTER X

ORANGE PUMPKINS

SALZAR established products were divided into three fundamental groups: Paging systems, used in factories and other organizations for locating important executives, sometimes called "Autocall" systems; industrial interior fire-alarm systems, also for use in factories and warehouses; and watchmen's recording systems.

Each completed system was set up on a huge test rack, in the department where Eddie worked. And it was his duty to test the bells and gongs. In this way he had quickly familiarized himself with the company's various units, without cluttering up his mind with a lot of needless manufacturing details.

The new equipment that the salesmen were to see for the first time upon their visit to the factory at the week end was a system for supervising sprinkler apparatus. A factory might be equipped with a fifty-thousand-dollar sprinkler system, but if the water happened to be *shut off* when a fire occurred, the elaborate system was worthless as a means of protection. Insurance companies carried many just such records of dis-

astrous fires. A workman would close a main valve to make some needed repairs in the line and then carelessly forget to turn the water on again.

The new Salzar supervisory system separately recorded the closing of each main valve, and, until the closed valve was opened again, a red light flashed "danger" at the managing executive's desk. It was felt by the progressive Sun Prairie company that there was a vast field for this new apparatus, hence their determination to "pep" up their selling force, with the hope of ending the year with spectacular selling records.

Shortly after eight o'clock Eddie was surprised, and a bit disturbed, to get a summons from the sales manager. Making sure that his hands and face were clean, he went nervously into the main office.

"I'm sorry, White. You're a good fellow. Personally, I think a great deal of you. You're clean all the way through. But from a standpoint of sales efficiency you aren't there. So I'm compelled to let you go."

Eddie had paused awkwardly in the doorway of the sales manager's private office upon observing that there was another visitor in the room, wondering whether business etiquette required him to withdraw. Then as he got a signal from the waspish, dressy executive at the big mahogany desk, he gingerly seated himself inside the door.

The man to whom the sales manager was talking hadn't looked around.

"What is there about my work, Mr. Fish, that you particularly object to?" came quietly and in an unmistakably pained voice.

"You haven't produced a sufficient volume of business to justify our further confidence in you as a salesman."

"I came here with a good record."

"True enough. And I had big hopes in hiring you. But you haven't delivered . . . not for us. Now, I have nothing but the kindest wishes for you. I would like to see you make good wherever you go. But, to your own interests, I—ah—feel constrained to say this, White: You'll never be the big success that you want to be, in any line, if you don't learn to *get what you go after.*"

"But, Mr. Fish——"

"You have a good approach," the sales manager disregarded the interruption. "You quickly gain the prospect's confidence. But when it comes to closing the deal, and getting the name on the dotted line, you aren't there. Why is it? Is it timidness? Is it lack of self-confidence? Is it a peculiar nervousness? Is it lack of aggressiveness? I don't know. You'll have to find the answer yourself."

"I think you're too hard on me, Mr. Fish."

"Working at this desk, it is my job to see that sufficient orders stream in to keep our wheels

turning profitably. To keep my job I've got to have men working for me who deliver. It isn't a question of my personal likes or dislikes. If a salesman produces, fairly and squarely, in keeping with our policies, that is what we want. We've *got* to have orders. Otherwise our factory would slow down and finally stop. Some uninformed people, even in our own organization, wonder why we cater to our successful salesmen. They hear now that we are planning a big convention and it puzzles them that we should spend so much money on our field men, sending for them and entertaining them. They don't seem to realize that the salesmen are the lifeblood of this institution. It is no great trick to manufacture all of the equipment that we can sell. The selling is the big trick. Every time. And the salesman who holds our warmest admiration, White, is the fellow, be he tall or short or lean or fat, who consistently *gets what he goes after.* In fact, we have no room in our selling organization for the man who does *not* get what he goes after."

It embarrassed Eddie to sit within hearing of this personal conversation. And as he grasped the situation his impulsive boyish sympathies were wholly with the discharged salesman. For he saw how he himself could fail under unfavorable conditions. He hadn't thought of it before in that light. Always in his enthusiastic daydreams

he had pictured himself as a nimble-heeled go-getter—a young man of spectacular victories. Now a queer panicky feeling rushed through him as he realized the obstacles that a salesman had to surmount in order to win great success. There was vastly more to selling than he had imagined. And for a moment, at the thought of his own boyish incompetence, he was tempted to rush from the room for fear that the cold-voiced sales executive at the big desk might offer *him* a selling chance!

With the promise of a field job, Harley Bagley had been kept waiting at the plant for four years. Eddie now saw why. Preparation! Factory training first; then office training, with free access to the salesmen's varied correspondence; the steady building up of technical knowledge and justified self-confidence.

The salesman was gone now, after a curt, cold word of farewell, so Eddie arose and approached the big desk.

"You sent for me, Mr. Fish."

The sharp black eyes seemed to pierce the faltering boy through and through.

"Are you the boy from the country whom we hired last June?"

"Yes, sir."

"As I recall, at that time you expressed a desire to go into training for field work."

Eddie gulped slightly.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you still determined to be a salesman?"

"Yes, sir." There was another perceptible gulp. "But I'm in no hurry, sir."

The understanding executive smiled in a peculiar restrained way. Then, for no particular reason, he thought of his own son, who at once was a great pride and a great disappointment to him.

"In that case," came dryly, "you won't be disappointed to learn that I have no immediate thoughts of offering you a selling job. . . . Have you a car?"

It was now the younger one's turn to smile.

"Yes, sir," he nodded, thinking of "Lizzie."

"Would you like to drive into the country this morning and look up some pumpkins for use during the sales conference?"

The boy stared.

"Pumpkins?" he repeated.

The sales manager briefly explained about the proposed barn dance.

"We thought at first that four dozen medium-sized pumpkins would be sufficient for our decorative scheme. But now I am told by the committee that we'll need at least eight dozen. Have you any pumpkins on your farm?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anything about pumpkins?"

"Not as much as I know about Salzar paging systems," the younger one smiled.

Which remark seemed to please the executive.

"There are two kinds of pumpkins, yellow and orange. Yellow pumpkins are quite common in these parts. And largely for that reason we prefer to have the other kind. Mr. Bagley will supply you with sufficient money. And you are to buy four dozen orange pumpkins for us. Try and get back to the factory as soon as possible. And if you meet my son in the country, please explain to him that he got away from here this morning before we could stop him. Otherwise it wouldn't have been necessary for us to interrupt your regular work."

Eddie was vaguely puzzled as he left the sales manager's private office. It seemed to him that the important executive was giving entirely too much thought to "pumpkins." And, further, it surprised him that a man holding such a big position could be so finicky over a mere detail. Orange pumpkins! What salesman would care a rap whether the decorative scheme at the proposed barn dance embraced orange pumpkins or yellow pumpkins? The sales executive might better be giving his time to more important matters, the puzzled boy concluded.

"But it makes me no difference, as the Dutch-

man says. If he wants orange pumpkins I'll get them for him, for, bu-lieve me, I don't care to have him read me a lecture like he did that salesman. I guess not! Orange pumpkins it shall be, Your Royal Highness, and nothing else but." The good humor that was an inherent part of the healthy boy's nature showed in his round face. "I wonder what he'd say if I wired him from Texas that I was still hopefully searching for orange pumpkins. Orange pumpkins! If there's an orange pumpkin in this end of the world I'll find it." Then the young face grew thoughtful. "But I wonder why he sent *me* out, instead of letting Poor Fish make another trip. That's queer."

The genial foreman of the testing department grinned when his young assistant explained that he had to crank up "Lizzie" and scour the country for a supply of orange pumpkins. As for the sales manager himself, that dignitary, no doubt, would have frowned in high dudgeon could he have heard the laughter behind his back as the foreman elaborately "peddled" the story to his cronies.

"Old Friday's a nut," was the general opinion of the workmen. Yet, even though they ridiculed the waspish, pompous executive behind his back, they held him in great respect. For they were conversant with the continued success

that attended his work. Acknowledged to be a high-pressure sales executive, he was getting high-pressure results.

In the meantime Eddie had left the plant. Having no choice of routes, his general impression was that the farmers west of town raised considerable truck stuff, so he headed in that direction.

At the end of three hours he had to his credit some twenty-odd "calls" but no "business." He could have bought a train load of common yellow "cow" pumpkins. But orange pumpkins—the choice "pie" pumpkins—seemed to be scarcer than proverbial hens' teeth.

"Ask the county agent," one farmer advised. "He's here, there and everywhere. And if there's an orange pumpkin in the county he ought to know about it."

Using the telephone, the young pumpkin buyer got in touch with the county agent's home.

"I can't tell you where Mr. Bray is," a feminine voice informed. "He may be home to dinner, and he may not. For frequently he goes away in the morning and stays all day."

"If he does come home at noon," the boy instructed, "will you please ask him if there are any farmers in this section raising orange pumpkins? And I'll get in touch with you later on."

Shortly after that, in a lonely section, "Lizzie" gave a peculiar despairing gulp in her mechanical

throat and wearily expired, seemingly glad of the chance to rest her rubber-tired legs. Tinkering the carburetor, Eddie made the not joyful discovery that he was out of gasoline.

Trudging down the sun-baked country road, a target for the jeering blue jays and flickers, he finally came to a shabby farmhouse. A dog was on guard. And knowing something about the savage nature of watchdogs, the hot-faced boy decided that it was safer for him to stay on the outside of the woven-wire fence.

"Hello!" he signaled the farmhouse in a lusty voice. But to his disappointment no one came into sight. Plainly the farmer and his family were away from home.

Still sweating from his walk in the hot sun, Eddie groaned at the thought of going on to the next farmhouse, which could easily be a mile away. That blamed dog! Having observed automobile tracks in the farmyard, the boy was confident that there was plenty of gasoline here if only he could get to it.

"Nice doggie!" he palavered. "Nice Bruno! Good old Rover!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" returned the "nice doggie," showing its teeth through the fence.

Eddie considered the closed gate. Suppose he opened it? Would the dog rush through and take after him? He shook his fists at the fearless animal.

"You measly cur! If only I could get you on this side of the fence while I got on the inside."

He opened the swinging gate an inch or two. Darting at the opening, the dog promptly tried to crowd through. That gave the boy an idea. Getting a big rock he placed it so that the gate couldn't possibly swing open more than ten inches. Then, getting set for a mighty leap, he lifted the latch, and in the instant that the dog rushed out of the yard he vaulted the gate, jerking it shut.

"Now," he panted in derision, safe on the inside, "go ahead and bark your head off, your four-legged fool."

A quick search of the farm buildings disclosed a gasoline tank . . . but it was empty! However, there was a can of kerosene on the farmhouse porch. At sight of the can the boy grinned.

"I bet a cookie that 'Lizzie' can run on kerosene. Sure thing. She'll smoke like sixty, but I should worry. The hard part will be to get the engine started."

Standing on the back porch, the pumpkin buyer let his eyes sweep down the slope. And what he saw a few rods away almost lifted him from his feet. Orange pumpkins! Hundreds and hundreds of them. He ran down the slope, fearful that when he came to the field he would discover that his eyesight had played a trick on him. But the pumpkins were indeed of a deep orange color

—the most beautiful pumpkins, Eddie acknowledged to himself, his respect growing for the man who had ordered them, that he ever had seen.

The dog was still barking savagely and springing against the closed gate. But Eddie gave the animal no attention. Running back to the house he noticed a note pinned on the door:

Dear Carrie: If you happen to come before we get back, go right inside and make yourself at home.

Mae.

Eddie laughed as he opened the unlocked door.

"If they can trust Carrie I guess they can trust me."

CHAPTER XI

FATHER AND SON

CALLING up the telephone operator, Eddie learned that he was in the home of Mr. Ham Brindle. But the girl could supply no information relative to the probable whereabouts of the Brindle family. And when the young pumpkin buyer became insistent she in turn became caustic. It wasn't her duty, she said, to keep track of the telephone company's numerous subscribers. However, Eddie was successful in getting a connection with the nearest neighbor.

"Hello," drawled a voice over the line.

"This is Eddie Garry speaking. I'm at the Brindle farm. Mr. Ham Brindle's place. Do you know——"

Bang! As the other receiver was angrily jammed onto its hook the boy jumped a foot.

"Hot-doggety!" he grinned, running a hand through his hair, a boyish habit that still clung to him. "I can see plainly enough what those people think of the Brindle family." Then he called the impatient operator and asked for a connection with another near neighbor.

"Fawncy!" the girl drawled. "The little boy is getting up a surprise party."

"Sure thing," Eddie returned brightly. "Won't you come and bring your chewing gum?"

"How you excite me! But really, kid—it's a clever little invention, I know, and Mr. Alexander Bell worked hard on it—but please don't wear it out."

"Now," said Eddie, grinning to himself, "you're making a fool of me."

"Im-possible."

"Haven't I heard your voice before?"

"Yah—me and Galli-Curci."

"Do you belong to the H.T.W. club?" Eddie showed that he could use his own wits.

"No, but I belong to the R.C.H.S.B.Y.P.F.S."

"Help!" the listener staggered.

"What does H.T.W. stand for?" the girl inquired curiously, evidently having no regard whatsoever for the rules of her office.

"Help the worthy."

"Well, of course," came sweetly, "having been imbued with the spirit of service (we get that in our first lesson), I'll do my best for you. So, if you'll reiterate. . . ."

Given another connection, Eddie was successful this time in getting a listener. Quickly he told his story. But the farmer could supply no information regarding the whereabouts of the Brindle family.

The young pumpkin buyer was getting desperate now. How would it be, he suggested, seeking the other's advice, if he took four dozen pumpkins from the field and left the money for them in the farmhouse, together with a note of explanation?

"Well," came slowly, "you kin do that if you want to. But from what I know of Ham Brindle *I* wouldn't care to try it."

"Why not?"

"You've seen his dawg?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, for a congenial companion I'd take the dawg. Good-by."

It was now one o'clock. And remembering about the county agent, Eddie wearily asked for a connection under that number.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the talkative operator, in pretended amazement. "Are you still rehearsing?"

"Remember," said Eddie, "that I've appointed you an honorary member of the H.T.W. club. So do your duty."

"Yah, and my great-aunt raises pansies."

"I'll need a bouquet of calla lillies," Eddie said wearily, "if you don't hurry up and give me a little service."

"This is a dull, dull woild. And if it wasn't for little diversions like this we poor telephone goils——"

"Goils?" repeated Eddie.

"Goils is what I said. It rhymes with coils. You know what I mean—little Red Riding Hood had beautiful golden coils."

"Be up-to-date," said Eddie, "and make it a permanent wave."

"Just a minute—my little granddaughter wants to give me a bite of her apple."

"Be careful," laughed Eddie, "that you don't choke on a seed."

"Oh, oh, oh," the operator gurgled. "It wasn't a seed, kid. I accidentally swallowed my false teeth."

"Hello," a man's deep voice then came over the wire.

"Is that you, Mr. Bray?" Eddie inquired quickly.

"Yep."

"This is Eddie Garry speaking. I work at the Electro-Call factory in Sun Prairie. This morning the company sent me out to buy four dozen orange pumpkins. Can you tell me——"

Here Eddie was interrupted.

"See Ham Brindle, north of the Prairie Queen schoolhouse," the busy man cut in. "He's the only farmer I know of in this section who's raising the dark-colored pumpkins in any quantity. As I understand it, he has some kind of a contract with Fostick, the Sun Prairie hay buyer. Fostick ships the pumpkins to a brother-in-law

of his in Chicago, who runs a select grocery store."

Eddie had the glad feeling that at last he was getting somewhere.

"And would I have to see Mr. Fostick if I wanted to buy some of the pumpkins?"

"Reckon you would."

A few moments later the boy had the grumpy hay buyer on the line, learning that the pumpkin grower had just left the hay man's office.

"Who really owns the pumpkins, Mr. Fostick? —you or Mr. Brindle?"

"Um . . ." came guardedly. "Why be you askin' me that?"

"I want to buy four dozen."

"Kain't sell you any," came the blunt refusal. "Got 'em all promised."

"Shucks! There's hundreds of them in the field. You'll never miss four dozen."

"Nope."

"I'll pay you what you can get for them in Chicago. And you won't have the bother of handling them."

"Nope."

Eddie was getting angry now. And with anger came boldness.

"Mr. Fostick, do you know who I am?"

"Nope. Nor I hain't carin' a particle, nuther."

"Well, let me tell you something: I'm the guy who gets what he goes after. See? Stand-

ing here at Brindle's telephone, I can see the pumpkins down in the field. And as soon as I get through talking with you I'm going to bring in my truck and load up." Waiting a moment for this to sink in, the boy continued his bluff. "There's no one here to stop me. I can take twenty dozen, if I want to. Now, what would you rather have me do?—steal your pumpkins or buy them from you?"

The hay buyer was tight-fisted, as Eddie knew.

"Um. . . . What are you willin' to pay?"

"What's your price?"

"Thirty cents apiece."

"Make it twenty cents," dickered the cautious young buyer, feeling that the other was trying to take advantage of him.

"Twenty-five."

"Twenty."

"All right," came crisply. "You owe me nine dollars and sixty cents. Now, young feller, who are you?"

The boy laughed.

"I'll drop in to-night, Mr. Fostick, and pay you. Good-by."

Carrying a pumpkin in each hand and one under each bowed arm, Eddie made twelve sweating trips from the field to the gate, where he dropped the pumpkins on the outside of the wire fence. Completing his twelfth trip, he got the can of kerosene, leaving plenty of money to pay for it,

and then, working the same nimble trick on the dog, got safely over the fence. Thirty minutes later he drove his smoking truck to the pumpkin pile and loaded up.

The dog was now digging under the gate. And grabbing his last pumpkin, Eddie made a flying leap for the truck as the furious animal completed its escape. There was a loud rip as the dog's teeth sank into the seat of the boy's pants. And, as can be imagined, the escaping one let out a tremendous yelp as the sharp teeth grazed his flesh. Turning the truck around, with the hateful animal snapping at the wheels, he started back to town, stopping at the first farmhouse to buy gasoline.

Anxious to get to the factory as soon as possible, he took a short cut, coming within sight of the sluggish river, where boys' voices struck his ears. Through the trees he caught a glimpse of several naked young bodies; and then he saw something else at the side of the road that caused him to jam on the brakes. The factory truck loaded with yellow pumpkins!

"Come on in," shrieked Poor Fish, recognizing the newcomer on the river bank. "The water's fine."

"Is this the way you tend to business," preached Eddie in fun, "when the factory sends you out on a job?"

"Oh, what's the diff?"

Feeling that he, too, had earned a swim, Eddie skinned out of his clothes. And for the next ten minutes he had as much fun in the water as the other boys. Then he quickly dressed himself.

"I've had a heck of a time," growled Poor Fish, sliding into his trousers. "First I had a blow-out and had to telephone for a garage man. And now I'm having ignition trouble."

Eddie had explained how he happened to be there instead of in the factory.

"I had some grief, too," he nodded. "Look at the seat of my pants."

"You're dumb," laughed Poor Fish, in getting the other's complete story. *"Me?*—I bought the first good pumpkins that I came to."

"Just the same," waggled Eddie, realizing for the first time that his stomach was painfully empty, "I'm glad I got the kind of pumpkins your father ordered."

When the boys were ready to leave, Poor Fish couldn't start his engine.

"Shucks! You're no mechanic," laughed Eddie. "Take my truck and I'll fix this old boat—and beat you home, too."

But this was an idle boast. For not until thirty minutes later did the dirty-faced young mechanic succeed in correcting the electrical trouble.

In the meantime Poor Fish had arrived at the

plant, where he saw his father and the factory owner talking on the sidewalk in front of the main office.

"There comes your boy now," laughed Mr. Salzar. "I wonder what kind of pumpkins he has brought."

There was a momentary flash of anxiety in the sales executive's face.

"Suppose we stop him and find out," the man suggested quietly, stepping to the curb and holding out his hand.

"Hi, Dad," grinned the pumpkin buyer. "Here's your donkey eggs. Where shall I put them?—in your office?"

Standing beside the truck, the two executives exchanged satisfied glances. And when they were alone the president impulsively thrust out his hand.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Fish. Your boy has better stuff in him than you led me to believe."

"I was afraid he wouldn't take my orders seriously," the sales manager spoke quietly, with a fond, far-away look in his eyes.

The president laughed in his jovial way.

"I bet he had a time finding those pumpkins. For, as I told you yesterday, to my knowledge there's only one man in the county raising them in any quantity. . . . Now, what are we going

to do if young Garry also comes in with a load of orange pumpkins?"

"Under the circumstances, I would ask your advice, sir."

"If it comes to an even draw between the two boys, I think we ought to decide in favor of your son. For a business friendship as close as ours is not without its obligations."

"Very well, sir."

"Here comes Garry now," added the president, looking down the street.

A pumpkin fell from the speeding factory truck as it turned a corner. The hurrying young driver, though, didn't know that he had lost a small part of his load; nor did he know that the fragments of the crushed pumpkin were of special interest to the president and sales manager of the company.

"Yellow," grunted Mr. Salzar, shrugging and turning away.

"Yellow," echoed the sales manager.

The following morning the news spread quickly through the factory that Poor Fish had been promoted to a desk in the sales department. Nor was there any rancor or envy in Eddie's heart when he warmly gripped his pal's hand and heartily wished the other boy success.

"Let's hope I'll be next," he laughed, going back to his work at the testing rack.

Bagley took his young successor in charge. But shortly the latter was requested to step into the department head's private office.

"If you had waited till this afternoon to send for me, Dad," the happy boy grinned, "you would have found me in a white collar. Gee! It's swell working in here. I'm going to like it."

The man's face was warm. And there was no mistaking the pride and affection in his eyes.

"Charles, I want to tell you that yesterday you brought more real joy into my life than I have known in a long time."

"Yes?" murmured the boy wonderingly.

"There have been times when you grievously disappointed me. You are a good boy; I never have had to worry about you from a standpoint of character; but it has seemed to me that you lacked industry. It took you five years to get through high school; and when I sent you away to college, see what happened."

"Aw, Dad!"

"Just a moment, Charles. I mention these things, not to lecture you, but to compliment you on the splendid work you did yesterday. You didn't know it, nor the Garry boy, but this orange-pumpkin deal was a test. Having decided to place Mr. Bagley in the field, we needed some young man, of selling inclinations, to fill the vacancy. The Garry boy was ahead of you, but Mr. Salzar expressed the wish that I give the

desk job to you. I wanted you to have the job, Charles, but on the other hand I didn't want to be unfair to the other boy. So I decided to put the two of you to a test. In the test *you* won out, and the Garry boy failed. So the promotion is yours. You have earned it." A hand came out across the desk's polished top. "I want to say again, Charles, that I am proud of you—very proud indeed. And I congratulate you."

The boy was staring, puzzled.

"But, Dad——"

"Here's the situation, Charles: A thing a young man *must* do if he is going to work for me is to obey orders. Yesterday you obeyed orders, and Garry didn't. You showed a definite fighting spirit in getting what I sent you after. And what about Garry? He brought in *yellow* pumpkins, Charles. Now, do you understand?"

The boy gave a low cry.

"Oh, Dad! I—I— *Oh!* . . ."

"Why, Charles!" came in quick alarm. "What's the matter?"

The miserable boy had dropped into a chair and lay over the desk with his face in his hands.

"Oh, Dad! You're going to despise me. You —you— Oh, I despise myself. Why didn't I think what I was doing. Don't you understand, Dad? I was driving Eddie's truck when you saw me. Those were his pumpkins."

It seemed that the sales executive never would

be able to get to his feet, so slowly did he arise. And if he had received a mortal wound his face could not have been more colorless or more drawn with pain.

"Oh, Dad! Forgive me. *Dad!*"

"I'm slow . . . in grasping the situation, Charles. But I—I think I understand. I am glad, my son, that you have told me the truth. I admire you for that. . . . Will you please send the Garry boy to me. I want to speak with him immediately."

A door connected the president's and sales manager's private offices. But neither the distressed man or the miserable boy had noticed that the door was open, or that the other executive had been sitting motionless at his desk.

"Just a moment," Mr. Salzar spoke up, coming quietly into the room. "Before you send for the Garry boy, Mr. Fish, I would like to make this suggestion: Yours is going to be a very busy department this fall; and it would seem to me that you are going to need two clerks to take Mr. Bagley's place, instead of one. Young Garry's industry entitles him to one of these jobs. And if the plan meets with your approval, suppose we put Charles to work at the other desk. I like his truthfulness and squareness. He's too manly to cheat. As for obeying orders to the letter, I think we can depend on him hereafter. How about it, Charles?"

For answer the boy got up and squared his shoulders. Then he started for the door.

"Orange pumpkins! Watch me get 'em, Dad. Only I hope that I don't lose the seat of my pants like Eddie Garry did."

CHAPTER XII

THE FACE IN THE WINDOW

CRASH! Bang!

"Hear that, Eddie? Somebody's cot went down."

"Maybe we better get up and look at the bolts of our own cots," came the laughing suggestion.

"I did look. We're all right."

A lively commotion ensued in an adjoining sleeping tent.

"They's sure-all goin' to be a bloody massacre 'round heah if I kaitch the sucker who dun loosened the laigs of my bed," a deep voice drawled, in characteristic southern style.

"It's Ballinger, the Atlanta man," laughed Thomas Halliday, who, in his warm interest in the bright-faced young sales department clerk, had generously invited Eddie to spend the night with him in the woodland convention camp.

Earlier there had been a huge campfire, built up of logs and stumps, around which had gathered the company's combined selling and manufacturing forces. Stories had been told; impromptu speeches made; outstanding selling victories related; and, in conclusion, the selling

force, through its wordy president, had presented Mr. Fish with a platinum wrist watch. To Eddie, the presentation was an emotional moment. For he thought of the time when he, too, would have a part in such affairs, either as one of the givers or as the recipient.

The commotion continued in the adjoining tent as the good-natured manager worked to get his collapsed cot in shape for comfortable use. And Eddie remembered then that he had overheard three of the high-spirited Atlanta "Juniors" scheming how they were going to upset their "chief" that night when the camp had quieted down.

At last, however, the cot was repaired to its grumbling user's satisfaction, and the lights were turned out. The silence that now reigned in the camp was much too deep to be reassuring. And suddenly, to no one's surprise, a wild shriek cut the air as the ringleader of the frisky Atlanta trio was dragged from his cot in his pajamas and plunged heartlessly into the near-by creek. Thus the southern manager had his revenge.

"Gee!" cried Eddie, tingling happily. "I never had so much fun in all my life."

"We don't get together very often," laughed Halliday. "So, when we do, we cut loose."

"You act like brothers."

"We work together, having the same ambitions and the same problems, so why shouldn't we

have a brotherly feeling toward one another? That is organization. We are what Mr. Fish has made us."

Eddie gave a queer laugh.

"I never dreamed that salesmen behaved like this."

"No?" the word was spoken curiously.

"I had the feeling that a successful salesman was a sort of superior, serious-minded person, all wrapped up in big thoughts, with no time for nonsense. But you fellows are a bunch of happy-go-lucky skylarkers."

"We're having our 'recess' now."

"I'm glad selling is like that," the boy added feelingly. "I'm going to like it all the better when I get into it. It's going to be fun working with men like you and Mr. Ballinger."

"We can be very exacting," came quietly from the branch manager, who wanted the favored boy to get no false ideas of field work.

"I would expect you to be," said the younger one simply, having learned something of the ways of business in the past ten weeks. "But you're fair. You wouldn't jump on a fellow unless he deserved it."

There was a short silence.

"How do you like your new job in the sales department?" Halliday inquired.

"Fine. But the work is so new to me right now that I don't know much about it."

"It's a stepping-stone to a field job, Eddie."

"So Mr. Fish explained to me."

"They didn't keep you in the factory quite as long as I had expected they would. Still," the experienced leader considered, "that may be all right. For it isn't factory experience alone that will make you a successful salesman. In the testing department you had an excellent chance to learn how the stuff is put together. You know how it operates. And on your new job, I imagine, you'll still keep in close touch with production, thus adding to your technical knowledge of the line. That is proper. At the same time it will be well for you to keep a close eye on what is going on in the field."

"I intend to," Eddie spoke earnestly.

"Make the salesmen's problems your problems," Halliday advised. "Look over their letters. That is your privilege. Learn about the various big deals that are hanging fire. Presently you'll find yourself taking a personal interest in each salesman's work. And when your friend Brown, for instance, sends in an order from the Monarch Shoe Company, you'll instantly recall the circumstances leading up to that order. At the beginning you may have sent friend Brown an inquiry; then you eagerly watched his later call reports on that particular job, thus getting a good insight into conditions in the Monarch plant. So, upon receipt of the

order, you know just how the deal was closed. And the enthused feeling will come to you that it is your order almost as much as it is Brown's, for you have kept in sympathetic touch with him in his work. You may even have sent his prospect suitable advertising pieces between calls, or you may have written a helpful selling letter or two concerning the matter."

Eddie laughed.

"*Me?* Gee! It would be *some* letter if I wrote it."

"Why do you say that?"

"I couldn't write a business letter."

"Why not?" Halliday followed up.

"Aw! . . . I haven't had any experience."

"Writing business letters is not difficult *if* you know your subject. So pack your head full of dope on Electro-Call methods, and keep in close touch with the field work. However, that is something for you to grow into. What are you doing now?"

"I handle the orders from the central district. As they come in I make out departmental factory orders, then follow the stuff through the plant to see that the shipment goes out on time. There are form letters, too, that I send out, thanking the customer for his order and giving the date of delivery."

"How do you like Mr. Fish?"

"I think he's fine." The boy's voice sobered.

"He sure used me square. Maybe you know how I happened to get the office job."

The salesman smiled to himself in the dark.

"Yes," said he, "I heard about the orange pumpkins. How is Mr. Fish's boy getting along?"

"Poor Fish? Oh, he's a different kid. He's working his head off."

"Running you a race, eh?"

"You might call it that."

"Some people say that Mr. Fish is a cold, unemotional man," the salesman added presently, in a reflective voice, "but my experience has been that the business world knows no fairer, squarer or more capable executive." There was a slight change in the tone of the man's voice. "How do you like Mr. Glazelle?"

Eddie hesitated to say outright that he had taken a quick dislike to the arrogant assistant sales manager. And he was glad that another noisy outbreak in the Atlanta section of the camp made it easy for him to change the subject. Halliday, however, again smiled to himself in the dark, and this time enigmatically. Keen man that he was, he knew well enough what was going on in the boy's mind. And at the moment he thought curiously of something he had heard about a dog's infallible judgment of a man. To this point of intuition, he wondered if boys and dogs weren't something alike.

"By the way, Eddie, will you be on hand for the big barn dance to-morrow night?"

"No. I wasn't invited."

"How about the Fish boy?"

"He would expect to be invited. For his father is the sales manager."

The tent was provided with two screened windows, for ventilation. And as Eddie glanced up at the window over his cot he caught sight of a man's head silhouetted in the moonlight. But even more startling to the farm boy, the prowler's eyes were concealed behind huge colored glasses.

With a cry, Eddie sprang out of bed. And thinking, from the younger one's actions, that some kind of a secret prank was in progress, the branch manager, too, ran outside.

But no one was in sight.

"Did you see some one?" Halliday inquired.

"Yes," Eddie spoke in a queer voice.

"You seem startled," the sales manager spoke curiously.

And indeed the farm boy was startled. More than that, he was trembling.

"I wonder—" he began, and his eyes were noticeably worried as he met those of the district manager. "Will it be all right, Mr. Halliday, if I use the telephone in the cook tent?"

"Are you sick, Eddie?"

"No-o. I want to call up my aunt."

It took considerable ringing on the part of the sleepy telephone operator to awaken the farm woman.

"This is Eddie, Aunt Hattie," the boy spoke quickly.

"Laws-a-me!" came sleepily, and in spite of his nervousness Eddie smiled to himself as he visualized the relative standing in front of the telephone in her nightcap and ruffled nightgown. "Whatever possessed you to call me up at this time of night?" the added words were spoken somewhat sharply.

"Say, Aunt Hattie, will you go upstairs and see if my watch is on the dresser."

Told that the watch was safe, the crafty young nephew further inquired:

"Was Andy sleeping?"

"Yes."

"You didn't awaken him?"

"No."

As Eddie's love for Andy had grown (and the absent one's inquiry about the broken watch was an innocent trick to learn if his new chum was safe in bed), so also had the conscientious farm boy experienced a mounting worry. Vague fears persisted in his mind. Could it be, he frequently asked himself, that Andy was in secret peril? Had he come here to seek his younger relative's aid (granting that there was a relationship between the two boys)? And now, un-

protected by his memory, was he liable to fall victim to some fearful fate?

Truly, thought Eddie, as he crossed the moonlit space between the cook tent and the row of sleeping tents, there was something sinister about the face that he had seen in the window.

"But granting that there was a man at the window, what makes you think it was your aunt's ghost?" inquired Halliday, when he had been admitted into his disturbed tent-mate's confidence.

"Because he had on Andy's glasses."

"Colored glasses are not unusual, Eddie."

"But these were such big glasses."

"Well, you may be right."

"Do you suppose he was watching me, Mr. Halliday?" the boy spoke in a peculiarly worried voice.

"I'm quite sure," laughed the manager, "that he wasn't watching me."

"But what was his object?"

"From what you've told me, Eddie, I deduce that you are involved in some peculiar mystery."

"I can't get away from the feeling that Andy is in danger. And now I'm wondering if his appearance in the neighborhood, as it ties up so closely with the ghost's appearance, is more than a mere coincidence."

"That isn't improbable."

Just as Eddie had been unable to attach any sensible reason to the chicken thief's ghostly attire, so also was he unable now to understand why the prowler had worn the missing glasses.

"I—I almost wish I was home."

"And you say this other boy bears a marked resemblance to you?"

"If you were to see us together, sir, you'd think we were brothers."

"Yet he is unable to throw any light on his past history?"

"The only thing he is sure of is his given name."

"How old a boy is he?"

"About twenty, I should judge."

"If this were a selling problem," the manager spoke earnestly, "I probably could give you some helpful advice. But I'm frank to confess that mysteries are out of my line. I shall be curious, though, to learn how things turn out."

The following morning Eddie was summoned to the general manager's private office, where, to his surprise, he found Laura Salzar seated stiffly at her father's desk.

"Ahem!" the girl gave herself an air of austere authority. "What is your name?"

"Edward Cornelius Garry," the boy informed, without the trace of a smile.

"Are you the boy called Eddie Garry?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is it true, young man, that you have a truck?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then get it and wait for me at the front door."

Turning to leave, the truck owner paused when a hand vigorously thumped the desk top.

"And make it snappy, young man," came the sharp command.

"Yes, ma'am," the words accompanied a speedy exit.

The order clerk wondered, as he ran his truck around to the office door, as instructed, what new commission was going to be handed to him. He never dreamed, though, that the general manager's daughter (and how she had enjoyed her little comedy in the private office!) was planning to accompany him.

"What fun," she laughed gayly, as the clattering truck headed into the country.

Eddie was so shocked to think of her riding in such an old rattletrap that he couldn't trust himself to words. Her father had plenty of cars. Why then, he asked himself, had she called upon *him* to drive her into the country?

"What's the matter, Eddie?" the dancing-eyed passenger inquired vixenly. "Has the cat got your tongue?"

"No," the boy spoke as shortly as possible.

"Oh, look! Here comes Daddy and Mr. Halliday. Stop, Eddie. Please."

"And now," thought the miserable young order clerk, "is where *I* get it in the neck."

For he could imagine how shocked the girl's wealthy parent would be at sight of her. Riding around in such an old truck as this! And she the heiress of a great fortune! Her indiscretion would be passed over. *He* would get the blame.

"Hi, Daddy. Hi, Mr. Halliday. I'm on my way to the farm, Daddy. And Eddie is going to help me decorate the barn."

"You could have used one of our cars, Laura."

"Don't be silly, Daddy. This is the most fun I've had in ages. . . . Will you be out to the farm this morning?"

"I don't think so, dear. For the convention throws an added burden on my shoulders."

"Eddie and I are going to work wonders in that old barn—only it's thoroughly understood that *I* am the boss. By the way, Daddy," the girl's eyes danced, as her thoughts took an added vixenish turn, "had you noticed how mortified he is? He can't even talk."

The manufacturer gave a jolly laugh. For shrewd student of human nature that he was he suspected the cause of the boy's embarrassment.

"It's mighty fine, Eddie," he put the order clerk

at his ease, "that we have a boy in the organization to whom we can turn for help when these little emergencies develop. When Laura offered to take charge of the barn decorations, thus relieving the regular committee, I told her that she could get all the assistance she needed at the office. And I'm glad she picked you. For I have great confidence in you. I trust, too, that Laura will prevail upon you to attend the party this evening. We have issued no formal invitations."

Nor did Eddie question his employer's sincerity.

"Your father is a wonderful man," the boy spoke feelingly, as the truck continued its clattering passage into the country.

"Yes," beamed the girl, "and Daddy thinks that you're a wonderful boy."

The driver gave a queer laugh.

"You shouldn't have said that. I may get the big-head."

"How do you like your new job?"

"Swell."

"And who's running the farm?"

"Herb and Uncle Alex."

"Haven't I noticed another boy in the yard?"

"Yes. He's boarding with us. His name is Andy."

"One day I stopped there to buy eggs. I think your aunt is a jolly woman."

"Everybody loves Aunt Hattie," the nephew spoke warmly.

It took many hours to arrange the pumpkins and corn shocks to the girl's satisfaction. In fact, Eddie was kept on the farm until late in the afternoon.

"Daddy and I will be looking for you to-night," Laura told the young driver, when he helped her out of his truck at the door of her imposing home. "So don't disappoint us."

"I'd be ashamed to come to the party in this old truck," Eddie spoke ruefully, thinking of all the costly cars that would be parked in the farmyard.

"If it's the best you can afford, it is nothing to be ashamed of," the girl spoke sensibly. "That is the way Daddy and I look at things."

"If I—I had a better car," Eddie spoke daringly, suddenly realizing how much pleasure her company had given him that day, "I would ask you if I might call and get you."

Then, as he thought of what he had said—a poor order clerk talking this way to his employer's daughter—he felt himself turning white.

"Suppose you ask me anyway?" the girl countered, with equal daring.

"Do you mean it?" Eddie gasped. And as he looked into her face he told himself that never had he seen anything so bewitchingly lovely and so completely desirable.

"I'll have to be there early, to help Daddy receive. So call for me not later than seven-thirty."

And Eddie, wildly happy boy that he was, promised to be on time.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JYRASTICUTUS

If Eddie's memorable night in camp had opened his youthful eyes to the fun-loving, rollicking side of the average high-class salesman's spontaneous nature, he was soon to learn, in the start of the big fall drive, that these well-conditioned field men knew how to bend their energies to systematic strenuous work.

September started in with a bang. In the first week the sales department entered on its books a total of more than sixty thousand dollars' worth of business. Indications were that the month would be a record breaker in point of sales. In consequence, every one at the home office was on his toes. Enthusiasm ran high.

These were tremendously happy days for Eddie. The more work that was piled up in front of him the better he liked it. That million-dollar goal! It was his goal now. He had that feeling. The company's interests were his interests.

Four weeks to the month, and four months to go, meant approximately sixteen weeks. Sixteen times sixty thousand dollars was how much?

There was some rapid figuring. Nine hundred and sixty thousand dollars. Hot dog! That was almost a million. What was a dinky little forty thousand dollars? Why, under special pressure the salesmen could roll in that amount of business in a single day. Such were the boy's enthusiastic thoughts.

But September's second week showed a marked decrease in orders. And the third week was even worse. Eddie was painfully depressed.

One afternoon a wave of shocked excitement ran through the office when it became known that the hard-working sales manager had collapsed at his desk. Eddie's warm young eyes were troubled and sympathetic as he nervously watched the closed door of the stricken man's private office. For he had just been told that for many months the valuable executive, thinking only of his duty to his company, had been hiding a serious inner illness that might now claim his life. That night Eddie found it hard to get to sleep. Somehow the distressed feeling persisted within him that he had lost a steady, understanding friend.

Thereafter the two new sales department clerks were drawn still closer together. For theirs seemed to be a common grief. In these dark days Poor Fish lost much of his happy-go-lucky attitude toward life. Quieter and more thoughtful in his ways, he pored over each little detail

of his work. And at night he patiently recited the day's happenings at his father's bedside. For the stricken sales leader could not content himself to be completely separated from the business that he had helped to build up.

"I almost wish that the doctors would take Dad away," Poor Fish miserably confided to his chum one morning.

"Is he getting worse?" was Eddie's sober inquiry.

"He worries over the way the orders are dropping off."

"You shouldn't tell him."

"How can I help it? He asks me. I'm not going to lie to him."

Eddie had the sudden feeling that he would like to get out in the field and "ginger" things up.

"If October doesn't show more speed than September," he said gloomily, "the big fall drive that we tooted our horns about when the salesmen were here is going to be a big fall fizzle."

"That's what worries Dad."

"Do you suppose the salesmen are lying down on the job because they know your father is sick in bed?"

"Oh, I hardly think they'd do that. But they need constant pepping up. It's their nature. And Dad sure was the boy who knew how to do it."

Eddie gave a furtive eye to his immediate surroundings.

"I don't believe the salesmen like Mr. Glazelle," he said in a low voice.

Poor Fish was silent.

"I know *I* don't like him," Eddie burst out boyishly. "And I don't think he likes me, either."

"Aw! . . ."

"Haven't you noticed the way he looks at me?"

"Dad says it's wrong to knock the men you're working for. . . . How did you like the picture show last night?"

"Pretty good. Were you there?"

"I saw you when you came out. You were with a tall, thin-faced man."

"That's Mr. Burgess." There was a light laugh. "I don't know what there is about me to attract him, but he's taken quite a shine to me it seems. For every time he comes to town he drives out to the farm and gets me."

Poor Fish's eyes were peculiarly questioning.

"Who is he?"

"I don't know very much about him, except that he's a traveling man. He isn't a salesman, though. He seems to have something to do with Y.M.C.A. work. I met him at our 'Y.' a couple of weeks ago. He told me that he was interested in boys."

That morning Eddie let his thoughts turn to things that were not a part of his regular work. And late in the afternoon he took his chum aside.

"I've been thinking, Poor Fish, that we ought to put on some kind of an October sales contest to speed up the orders. Each salesman who turns in a certain amount of business gets a premium in addition to his regular commission. See?"

"Sales promotion stuff, hey?"

"Is that what you call it?"

"Dad has worked the premium scheme to a frazzle. He's had all kinds of contests, ranging from automobile races to baseball games. Free hats one month, free shoes the next, with turkeys for November and December. Ask Miss Haas to get you the 'sales promotion' file. The stuff is all together. And you can see what has been done."

Eddie gladly accepted his friend's suggestion.

Having finally abandoned the rickety truck, Eddie was walking home that night, with a brief case full of material from the "sales promotion" file, when a quiet-running car overtook him.

"I happened along just in time to give you a lift," laughed the pleasant, thin-faced driver, throwing open the car's right-hand front door.

Eddie's face lit up.

"I didn't know that you were still in town, Mr. Burgess."

"Oh," the man gestured carelessly, "it's hard to tell from one hour to the next where I am likely to be. . . . What have you there?"

"Some sales promotion dope. I'm going to

study it to-night and see if I can't think up some kind of a sales promotion stunt."

"Is that your work?"

"Oh, no! I'm just an order clerk. But Mr. Fish, our sales manager, is ill. So things in our department are kind of upset. And if I can suggest a practical sales promotion scheme it will be a feather in my cap."

The car slowed up and stopped noiselessly in front of the newly-painted farmhouse.

"Won't you come in and have supper with me, Mr. Burgess?" the boy invited politely, remembering the numerous favors that the man had showed him.

"I have an appointment in town in twenty minutes. Sorry." The eyes smiled. "And I suppose you'll be too busy with this—ah—sales promotion work of yours to take a drive with me after supper."

"I feel that I ought to stay at home to-night, for I was out late last night. Good-by, Mr. Burgess. See you again. And thanks ever so much for the invitation."

Aunt Hattie seldom missed anything that was going on around the farmhouse.

"Who was that?" she inquired of her nephew, meeting him in the doorway.

"Mr. Burgess."

The practical woman followed the disappearing car with a perplexed face.

"He's so much older than you, Eddie. It's hard for me to understand his interest in you."

"He's crazy over my good looks," joked Eddie. Then, in setting down to supper, he grew thoughtful. Both his aunt and his office chum had wondered at his sudden friendship with the strange man. And, to that point, maybe it was odd that the man had taken such a fancy to him. Could it be— Once before the farm boy had wondered if his meetings with the affable stranger were purely accidental.

Eddie impatiently awaited the arrival of his young office chum the following morning.

"Say, Poor Fish," he began eagerly.

"Well?"

"When does a Jyrasticutus?"

Poor Fish stared.

"When does a giraffe—*what?*"

"I didn't say giraffe. I said Jyrasticutus."

"What in heck is a Jyrasticutus?"

Eddie's eyes were dancing.

"Kid, I've got the peachiest sales-promotion scheme up my sleeve that you ever heard about."

"A Jyrasticutus!" puzzled Poor Fish. "Is it alive?"

Eddie laughed.

"It moves; but rather slowly."

Poor Fish still looked puzzled.

"I give up."

"We're going to have a Jyrasticutus contest.

See? Each salesman who makes his quota gets a Jyrasticutus free."

"Quota" was a term used in the sales department to designate the amount of business that a salesman was expected to close in a given month. For example, if a salesman's "quota" was six thousand dollars, and he sold an even six thousand dollars' worth of equipment, he would make exactly one hundred per cent of his "quota." If he sold nine thousand dollars' worth of stuff, he would make one hundred and fifty per cent of his "quota."

"But you haven't told me what a Jyrasticutus is," Poor Fish reminded.

"That's the original feature of the contest," laughed Eddie, in high spirits. "In your father's contests he always specified commonly known prizes. In this contest we're going to have deep, dark mystery. See? A salesman won't know what a Jyrasticutus is till he receives the one he earned."

"But what is a Jyrasticutus?"

"There you are," cried Eddie gleefully. "Already you're crazy to know what a Jyrasticutus is. And that's the way the salesmen will feel when they hear about the contest. What's a Jyrasticutus? Everybody will be asking that. Bill, Jim, Tom, what *is* a Jyrasticutus? I've got my scheme all worked out. Draw up a chair and I'll show you my stuff."

A rather pursy and decidedly pompous type of man, with a big red face and small, cunning eyes, the acting sales manager listened with scarcely a word of comment while the enthusiastic young sales clerk recited the details of his Jyrasticutus scheme.

"The salesmen are a jolly bunch, Mr. Glazelle," the boy concluded. "They like fun. We saw that at the recent convention. And they'll enjoy this joke. In wanting to find out what a Jyrasticutus is, they'll work harder, I think, than if the prize was a pair of shoes or a hat."

Mr. Glazelle remained silent.

Leaving the manager's office a few moments later, Eddie was quickly stopped by his anxious chum.

"Did you get his O.K.?" came the eager inquiry.

There was an abstracted nod.

"I can't understand that man, Poor Fish. All the time I was in his office he didn't say a dozen words. I had to do all the talking. And there was something in the way he listened—something in the expression of his eyes—that gave me the fidgets. I half wish I hadn't gone to him with my scheme."

"You're cuckoo."

"He doesn't like me, Poor Fish. I'm more convinced of it than ever."

"Shucks! What you expected was a lot of fine

praise. And because you didn't get it you're peeved."

"I'm half afraid to go ahead with the scheme. For if it flivvers I know what'll happen to me."

"Bu-lieve me, kid, it isn't going to flivver. It's a good scheme, and Mr. Glazelle knows it is. Otherwise he wouldn't have put his O.K. on it."

"But he never changed a thing or offered a single suggestion."

Poor Fish laughed.

"Which shows that your work is perfect."

"I had expected him to make some suggestions. But, as I say, he just sat there like an old Sphinx. . . . I wish I could ask your father about the scheme before going ahead with it. I'd feel safer."

"Nothin' doin'," cried Poor Fish hastily, knowing of the restless night that the sick man had put in.

There was a mimeograph in the sales department. And enlisting the services of the duplicating machine's operator, Eddie and Poor Fish got out the following special bulletin that morning, a copy of which was mailed to each of the salesmen:

JYRASTICUTUS SPECIAL

Published every now and then by Eddie and Poor Fish, of the sales department, in the interests of a BIG OCTOBER.

October!—that is to be the BIG month. And to make it an object for the salesmen to work harder, we are going to introduce the Jyrasticutus.

But don't ask us what a Jyrasticutus is—not now! It's too early. We're going to keep it under cover till October. Then you will learn more about this truly wonderful creature.

We made the discovery of this species in its wild state in one of our recent trips with an exploring party in the sand dunes between the Indian Ocean and Kokomo. It lends itself readily to domestication and multiplies rapidly under cultivation.

On the other hand it is extremely difficult to capture—very elusive! It has relative small commercial value. As a curiosity its value is inestimable.

If you like mystery, lay aside your A. Conan Doyle, park your Ford runabout and wait for the Jyrasticutus.

We are propagating the species and will introduce it in various localities during October, in which month it is at its best.

Specimens will be released early in the month and full instructions as to their capture will be forthcoming.

Now, don't ask us any questions. But watch for the next announcement.

CHAPTER XIV

EDDIE'S MISFORTUNE

SPECIALTY salesmen, such as Eddie and Poor Fish were associated with in their desk work, usually are paid in one of two fundamental ways —they are given a straight weekly or monthly salary, with all expenses paid by the company; or they work on commission, paying their own expenses.

Electro-Call salesmen were all commission men, the branch managers (the company's star salesmen) getting thirty per cent on their own sales and five per cent on the sales of the men under them. The regular salesmen earned twenty-five per cent. As the majority of the salesmen had a monthly quota of approximately four thousand dollars, it will be seen that they were all strictly high-class men, capable of earning from ten to fifteen thousand dollars a year. Of course, of these high earnings, the men had heavy traveling expenses, which came out of their own pockets; yet the net earnings of the salesmen averaged around ten thousand dollars.

A good specialty salesman has great pride in his work. If he loses an order he feels that it

is a direct reflection on his selling ability. On the other hand, if he puts across a neat selling trick he likes to talk about it, almost to the point of bragging. If his name isn't in the company's published monthly "quota" group, he is unhappily depressed; or, if his name is published as a "quota" man, he longs for first place in the list. In planning his Jyrasticutus contest, Eddie had taken all of these things into consideration. He felt that by arousing the salesmen's curiosity he would constantly keep the contest before their attention; and he depended on their pride in their work to swing them, with special efforts, to success.

The first Jyrasticutus bulletin was followed by another, which was mailed to the salesmen in the close of September:

JYRASTICUTUS SPECIAL

Published every now and then by Eddie and Poor Fish, of the sales department, in the interests of a BIG OCTOBER.

"Jyrasticutus" Pronounced and Defined

PRONUNCIATION: Jȳ-răs-tĭ-cū-tŭs.

DEFINITION: The first syllable—Jy: A corruption of the Japanese Jiu Jitsu, an athletic term having to do with the development of strength. As applied to Electro-Call selling, signifying strength

to cope with any prospect and come off the field victorious.

The second syllable—ras: From the Irish word rassel, sometimes spelled wrestle, meaning to contend with, by grappling with and striving to throw down an opponent. In Electro-Call parlance, the endeavor to overthrow the barriers of opposition.

The third syllable—ti: An abbreviation of the Greek word Titan, the name of the fabled giants of ancient mythology, famous for their size and strength. In the latter quality to be compared with the Electro-Call salesmen who are going to put over the Big Fall Drive.

The fourth syllable—cu: From the Hindu cull, meaning to separate, select, pick out, to choose and gather or collect the good from the bad. Signifying the Electro-Call salesman who can separate the good prospects from the bad and turn the good ones into customers.

The fifth syllable—tus: The last syllable of the word impetus, which is the popular equivalent for momentum, vigor, force. The property possessed by a moving body by virtue of its weight and motion. Typified in the momentum of the Electro-Call sales organization, which is counted on to carry it through the balance of the year with flying colors.

The salesmen hadn't paid very much attention to the first bulletin—at least Eddie and Poor Fish had seen little mention of it in the branch office

correspondence. But the second bulletin awakened wide interest. "What in heck is a Jyrasticutus?" wrote Halliday from the Chicago office. "What kind of a new sales promotion scheme is this that you are springing on us? Is a Jyrasticutus some kind of a pet? If we win one, do we get a cage with it? Or do we keep it in an aquarium?"

Proud of their work, the boys sent this letter across Mr. Glazelle's desk, hopeful that the communication would come back to them, for filing, with a complimentary comment penciled on the margin. But to their disappointment the letter didn't come back. As a result, Eddie was peculiarly depressed. It seemed to him that the acting sales manager was taking special pains to show no interest or responsibility in the unique content.

But Poor Fish's enthusiasm quickly lifted Eddie out of his depression. And working to a schedule, the two boys released the following bulletin on the first day of October:

JYRASTICUTUS SPECIAL

Published every now and then by Eddie and Poor Fish, of the sales department, in the interests of a BIG OCTOBER.

Look Out! There's a Jyrasticutus Headed Your Way

This morning, exactly on the stroke of four-thirty, we personally loaded in the fuselage of our airplane thirty-six fine Jyrasticutus specimens.

Dandy fine creatures, all of them—a delight to a person interested in biological specimens of this nature. Without any thought of throwing bouquets at ourselves, we admit that these specimens are equal in size and color to the pair that Noah chaperoned on the Ark.

We can appreciate that Electro-Call salesmen will forever feel grateful to us for devoting our personal time to the propagating of the specimens now in transportation.

The airplane pilot has been instructed to release one of these specimens in the territory of each Electro-Call salesman, but to gain possession of his Jyrasticutus each salesman must, unaided, make the proper approach and effect a capture.

First: Each salesman securing his quota will be given instructions as to where to go and how to proceed to make a capture.

Second: Each salesman making his quota by October fifteenth, not having received instructions, will be fully informed.

Third: The salesman having the largest per cent of his quota by October fifteenth will receive a selected hand-cultured specimen direct from our propagating station.

Fourth: Each salesman making his quota for the month, not having received a specimen or instruc-

tions for capture, will be properly and thoroughly informed as to how to proceed to land a specimen of the first quality.

Fifth: The salesman having the highest per cent of his quota for the month will receive a deed in fee simple for our private propagating station the entire product and all equipment.

From the first of October to the tenth, similar bulletins were sent out, one a day, all of which were designed to further arouse the salesmen's curiosity. There was a nice volume of business. But the salesmen's pace wasn't fast enough to promise victory to the big fall drive. September had produced considerably less than two hundred thousand dollars' worth of business. And now it would seem that October sales were not going to run high.

A telegram was received from Ballinger on the tenth of the month, stating that he would arrive at the home office the following morning. When Eddie learned of this telegram he immediately sought his office chum.

"Something's wrong."

"I bet I know what it is," Poor Fish nodded gloomily. "One of Ballinger's salesmen lost that big Southern Storage deal."

"What?" cried Eddie, with something like a sudden chill.

"A ten-thousand-dollar deal. Paging service

—fire-alarm—sprinkling supervision. I saw a letter from Barbour. The Eagle Electric Company got the order."

Eddie had a boyish hatred for his company's chief competitor.

"Dog-gone!" he cried, with troubled eyes. "That makes three big deals that the Eagle company has taken away from us this month."

At ten o'clock the following morning Eddie was summoned to the general manager's private office. There he found Ballinger pacing the floor, with a dark, troubled face. There was an atmosphere of constraint in the room that gave the nervous boy a sudden terrified feeling. He wondered what blunder he had made.

"Sit down," came crisply, almost sharply, from the composed executive at the desk. There was a moment's painful silence in which two pairs of eyes bored holes through the now panicky young clerk.

"I presume you have heard," the general manager began, in a cold voice, "that Mr. Ballinger lost the Southern Storage deal."

The boy moistened his lips.

"Yes, sir," said he thickly.

"A ten-thousand-dollar deal. We have worked on it for weeks. The chief of our engineering department even went to Atlanta to draw up installation plans. We have spent our time and money; and now our competitor gets the business.

It is no coincidence to us that this big deal was lost to us on top of others. Mr. Ballinger tells me that the Atlanta representative of the Eagle company is carrying copies of our blueprints in his selling kit. That can mean but one thing—there's a leak in our office. Some one in the sales department has been passing out to our competitor tips on the big deals that we're working on. Have you anything to say?"

Eddie was staring, white-faced.

"Why, Mr. Salzar! You—you don't suspect—you don't think that I would do a thing like that!"

"Who's this hatchet-faced man you've been riding around with lately?"

"Mr. Corbin Burgess."

"When you're with him do you talk about your work?"

"Why—I may have—some. He—he asks me questions."

"Oh, indeed!" came the snarl. "And I presume that anything he wants to know about our business you tell him."

"I haven't told him much. I don't remember what I have told him."

"Did you tell him about the Southern Storage deal?"

"Not that I remember. I may have mentioned it."

"Then he didn't get any blueprints from you?"

"No, sir."

A photograph was tossed across the desk.

"Is that your friend Burgess?"

Eddie could barely speak now. Something cold and tenacious clutched at his throat. And in reaching for the picture he found that he could scarcely move his arm.

"Well?" came sharply.

The tortured boy nodded.

"Burgess, eh? His name was Black when we fired him two years ago. One of the crookedest men we ever had in this office. I had heard that he was with the Eagle company. Spying around here is stuff to his style. Well, my boy, I hardly know what to do in your case. I can't help feeling out of patience with you. Don't you know better than to talk about our business with every Tom, Dick and Harry you meet? After this, when you're around strangers, keep your mouth shut. I realize, of course, that you wouldn't have given this spy his tips if you had known who he was. But at the same time that doesn't alter the fact that you *have* given him information that has enabled his company to take thousands of dollars' worth of business away from us. Easy enough for them to underbid us when they knew just what we're doing. The lesson you have learned has cost us a small fortune. However, I am not going to discharge you. You may go back to your work."

Eddie sought permission of the office manager to go home that noon. He couldn't do his work. His head was in a whirl. There was a cold, dead feeling in his heart. Enthusiasm had given place to helpless despair.

"I'm going to quit," he told his cousin miserably.

Herb regarded the younger boy with troubled eyes.

"What's wrong?" he inquired sympathetically.

"They think I'm a spy."

"Shucks!" was Herb's advice, when the complete story had been told to him. "I wouldn't think of quitting if I were you. I should say not! Mr. Salzar *will* suspect you're crooked if you do that."

"Oh, I hate my work. I can't stand it."

"You'll feel better to-morrow."

"They'll never trust me again. They'll always remember this matter."

Herb was thoughtfully silent.

"I never liked the appearance of that man Burgess. But I hesitated to tell you so. For I didn't want to butt in. He ought to be tarred and feathered."

Eddie's eyes blazed.

"Wait till I see him! I'll tell him a thing or two to remember."

"Aw! . . . That won't do you any good. Why don't you set a trap for him?"

The boys' eyes met.

"What do you mean?"

"You say he's getting blueprints and other stuff out of your office. Maybe, if you get around him in the right way, you can find out who the traitor is. And if you can do that, Mr. Salzar ought to have confidence in you again."

The fall had been dry and hot, prolonging the warm-weather activities.

"Come on," added Herb, who never tired of water sports, "let's get Andy and run down to the hollow for a dip. That'll cheer you up. And I've got plenty of time for fun this afternoon."

Just before the boys reached the hollow Eddie caught sight of a familiar car coming down the country road.

"Burgess!" he gasped.

Herb was quick-minded.

"Stop him," cried the older cousin, jumping into the underbrush. "Coax him to go in swimming with you and undress over there in those bushes. I've got a scheme."

CHAPTER XV

UNEXPECTED VICTORY

OUTSIDE of a flushed face and twitching nerves, Eddie had himself well in hand when the car came along.

"Hi," he shouted, waving.

There was a screeching of brakes.

"Well, well," laughed the always affable driver, giving the hot-faced boy a curious eye. "I didn't expect to find you here. Having a vacation?"

"Oh, I didn't feel like working this afternoon."

"I don't blame you. For it's as warm and sunny as any July day that I ever knew."

"Run your car over there."

"For what reason?"

"I want you to go in swimming with me."

"But I was heading for Sun Prairie."

"We can have fun. Besides," the boy added craftily, "I want to tell you about my sales promotion scheme."

The spy swallowed the bait.

"It's been a good many years," he laughed, "since I went in swimming boy-style. But I'm game. Come on."

"This is a pal of mine," Eddie then introduced. "His name is Andy."

"Glad to meet you, Andy."

But the boy to whom the words were spoken seemed unconscious of the extended hand.

"It seems that I—I have met you before," he faltered, struggling, as he did so often of late, with his shattered memory.

Burgess gave a perceptible start.

"You may have seen me in Sun Prairie."

"No-o. It was some place else."

"What place have you in mind?"

"I—I don't know."

"Maybe *you* remember," Eddie put in quickly.

"No," the man shook his head.

An hour later Eddie and Andy were dropped at the farmhouse door.

"Do I see you to-night?" the man inquired good-naturedly, which remark, of course, was directed at the office boy.

"Maybe. Andy and I were talking of going to town. If we do I'll look you up at the 'Y.'"

Herb was in the farmyard.

"It may not have been ethical," he grinned, when his eager-faced cousin joined him, "but while you and your 'friend' were in the creek I rifled his pockets. Take a look at this."

Eddie accepted the letter. And when he came

to the signature a cry of amazement escaped him.

"Why—why I can hardly believe it."

"What you had better do," Herb advised, "is to take this letter to Mr. Salzer right away. Tell him how you got it. He'll know what to do with it."

The following morning Eddie's office associates, including Poor Fish, were electrified to learn that the acting head of the sales department had been summarily dismissed. But aside from the company's chief executive, who had sprung the trap in which the traitorous manager had been caught red-handed, only the young order clerk knew the exact circumstances back of the discharge.

Gradually, though, the story leaked out.

"You're a dandy," growled Poor Fish, with resentful eyes. "Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Mr. Salzar asked me not to."

"You and Mr. Salzar! I suppose you're his pet now."

Eddie grinned.

"Jealous, hey?"

"I heard that Mr. Salzar and Glazelle had a fight in Burgess' room at the hotel."

"Oh, it wasn't a fight—not a real fist fight. But, bu-lieve me, Mr. Salzar told that crook where to get off at. You see, my cousin Herb

found a letter of Glazelle's in Burgess' pocket. And that is how we knew Glazelle was planning to meet Burgess at the hotel that night. Mr. Salzar and I went up the fire escape in the dark —can you imagine that! And we saw and heard the whole thing through the open window. And when we stepped into the room! . . . Say, Glazelle was as white as a sheet. I thought he was going to faint. Nor did he offer the least resistance when Mr. Salzar yanked away from him the blueprints that he was on the point of giving to Burgess. And did a scoundrel ever get a calling down. Wough!"

Poor Fish's face was puzzled.

"I can't understand why Glazelle sold out his own company."

"He's been signed up with the Eagle Electric for two months. All that kept him here was to pass out information and get the latest details of our sprinkler stuff. The funny part is that because I picked up a letter of his he thought I suspected him. As a matter of fact I never read the letter. But he hated me, thinking I had read it. And to keep his own skirts clean, until he was ready to pack up and get out, he had Burgess hang around me to throw suspicion my way and thus entangle me."

Poor Fish laughed queerly.

"Who's our boss now? Did you get the job?"

Eddie laughed, too.

MR. SALZAR AND I WENT UP THE FIRE ESCAPE IN THE DARK.

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"No need of a boss, kid, when we've got a perfectly good Jyrasticutus working for us."

"You and your Jyrasticutus!"

"With Glazelle out of the way, we're going to get more of those big orders. Watch us."

"Let's hope so. We sure need them."

A few days later Eddie was again summoned to the general manager's private office.

"Garry, what's this Jyrasticutus scheme that you're working on?" Mr. Salzar inquired.

Eddie explained about his sales promotion scheme.

"And you say Glazelle approved this?"

"Yes, sir."

"The crook! He's trying to get some of our men away from us. Here's a letter from Mr. Fry of the New York office. Fry says all of his salesmen have been offered inducements to quit us and go with the Eagle bunch. Our men are being told that we're tricking them in this contest of yours. What is this Jyrasticutus, anyway, Eddie?"

Eddie took something from his pocket and put it on the desk.

"Is that the premium you intend giving to our quota men?"

"Yes, sir. It's a joke, of course—a double joke, in fact. We'll let them think——"

"Garry," the younger one was interrupted without ceremony, "Glazelle played you for a

sucker. It's as plain as day to me. He let you go ahead with this scheme so that later on he could use it to his own advantage. *He* saw the flaw in it. It's a clever scheme, in a way. But, my boy, consider the indignation of our field men —and they are all big, talented, high-pressure fellows—when you send them this nonsensical toy. In the past our premiums have been worth while. And naturally our men will expect something worth while in this contest. Not getting it, they are going to feel tricked. That is a bad situation. We must stop the contest immediately."

"But, Mr. Salzar, you haven't heard my whole scheme. The Jyrasticutus itself is a joke. However, a winning salesman will get *morc* than a Jyrasticutus. He'll get a supply of fodder. And the only 'fodder' a real he-Jyrasticutus eats is greenbacks."

The executive straightened quickly.

"What's that?"

Eddie talked quickly for several minutes. And then the executive leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

"But how does it come that Glazelle knows nothing of this—ah—fodder scheme of yours?"

"I was all fussed the morning I talked with him. And I forgot to tell him about the fodder."

"Um. . . . I think you had better let me get out a special bulletin this morning. The sales-

men will have more confidence in the contest if they know I'm back of it."

It seemed to Eddie, though, that the general manager's message failed entirely to reassure the field men, for the orders grew fewer and fewer. Not only had the Jyrasticutus scheme fallen flat; but worse than that it had aroused a feeling of ill will in the field.

Eddie's state of mind can readily be imagined. It seemed to the distressed boy that he had upset everything. And he began to hate his work. There were moments when he longed to jump up from his desk and run away. The sound of the gongs in the testing room taunted him. Their metallic voices seemed to shout: "Failure! Failure!" Leaving the office at the close of the month, it was with the defeated determination never to go back to his desk again.

That night he went to his room and wrote a long letter to the manager of the Chicago office. For Halliday had been his friend. And he wanted the branch manager to know just why he was quitting his job."

"So I'm going back to the farm," was his concluding thought. "I don't like farm work, as you know, but I'm going to force myself to like it. You have been kind to me, Mr. Halliday; you sort of made me feel that I could do big things in the business world; but I guess I haven't the right kind of stuff in me. Maybe

you will lose all interest in me. Yet I hope you will not."

Here the telephone rang.

"Hey, Eddie," Herb called up the stairs. "Poor Fish wants to speak to you."

"Hello," Eddie said quietly over the wire.

"Say," came the laughing inquiry, "when is a Jyrasticutus?"

The farm boy winced.

"You aren't funny, Poor Fish."

"Got a grouch on, hey?"

"Oh! . . . I just don't feel good to-night."

"Well, I can tell you something that'll pep you up. Halliday's here."

"At your house?"

"Sure thing. Mr. Salzar, too. And Dad's out of bed."

Eddie gave a glad cry.

"Is that his voice that I hear in the background?"

"Sure thing. He and Halliday are gabbing back and forth like a couple of old maids. Halliday's going to be our acting sales manager until Dad is able to get back to his desk. Say, Eddie, how many of those tin bugs have you on hand?"

"Twenty."

"Well, you'll need fourteen more, for thirty-four of our salesmen hit quota. Halliday put it across. He's been pulling the strings from the Chicago office. The salesmen all over the terri-

tory have been sending their orders to him, to bring to Dad on his birthday. Sure thing, it's to-day—didn't you know? More than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of business all in one big gob. No wonder Dad got out of bed. The doctors are giving better reports about him, too. Oh, things are going to hum now. We're going to get that million dollars, and then some. And here's some good news, Eddie: You and a certain talented guy by the name of Poor Fish are going to get a raise. Yah, five bucks a week. That's our reward, Mr. Salzar says, for being clever and thinking up smart Jyrasticutus schemes. Notice I said 'our' reward. Ha! ha! See you to-morrow, kid."

At the office the following morning thirty-four ten-cent tin crawling bugs were boxed and sent by registered mail to the thirty-four winning salesmen. And in each box was a cleverly-folded twenty-dollar bill.

"Here is your Jyrasticutus," a note stated. "Also we are enclosing a supply of 'fodder.' Detailed feeding rules will follow in a later mail. May you be justly proud of the part that you have played in putting October *over the top.* With the Big Fall Drive half over, we have to our credit a trifle under half a million dollars' worth of business. With your continued loyal help, and the continued help of our other loyal field men, we are going to reach our goal."

CHAPTER XVI

WINTER

REALIZING that he wasn't half as sick as his nervous aunt imagined, Eddie grinned, like the big boy that he was at heart, as the little old lady continued to fuss around him with fidgety hands and anxious eyes. First the big rocking chair in which he was seated was positioned meticulously in front of the cheerful sitting-room heater, with its sleek black cheeks and coronet of polished nickel. Then the red, home-made comforter that had been spread in the chair was carefully wrapped around the vigorous young body.

Whistling merrily, Herb came down the stairs with an overcoat slung over his arm. Aunt Hattie, too, had gotten her winter wraps ready. For outside of the cozy farmhouse the green of summer and the tinsel of autumn had been lost in the leaden grip of early December.

Herb got into his overcoat.

"Ready, Ma?"

There was a nervous sigh as the anxious elder relative hung over the invalid.

"Oh, dear! I don't feel right about going to town and leaving Eddie alone."

"A cold isn't anything to worry about, Aunt Hattie."

"What if you get pneumonia?"

"Aw! . . ."

"Say, Ma," grinned Herb, "don't you think he ought to have a hot foot bath, or another mustard plaster?"

"I'll fix you," came hoarsely from the folds of the comforter.

Aunt Hattie got into her wraps.

"Now, Eddie," was her final pleading advice, "do be a good boy and keep yourself wrapped up, as I tell you. Here's the throat gargle in this glass. And here's the pills that you're to take every hour. So be sure and watch the clock."

Having helped his mother into the curtained carriage at the side door, Herb ran back to the house.

"Shall I stop at the Electro-Call factory, Eddie, and tell them how you are?"

"Rats! I'd go to work to-morrow morning if Aunt Hattie would let me. I bet they need me right now."

"It won't hurt you to stay inside for a day or two more, at least."

"If you do stop at the factory, tell Poor Fish to call me up on the telephone. For I want to find out how the orders are coming in."

"Is Poor Fish doing your work?"

"I suppose so. Blame it! Hurry up and get Aunt Hattie away from here so that I can shed this comforter. I'm smothering to death."

Herb grinned.

"Wait till I tell her."

"Don't you dare," laughed Eddie; and then the boys' eyes met in friendly understanding. For they both loved the nervous little old lady who was a fond parent to one and a gentle guardian to the other.

A few moments later the farm carriage disappeared down the drab country road in the direction of Sun Prairie. And with a sigh of relief the invalid promptly unwound his husky legs from the folds of the comforter and got to his feet.

Roaming restlessly through the farmhouse, he got his eyes on the chest in which his early toys were contained. And as he spread the battered playthings before him, not so much to examine them as to live again in the memories that they conjured up in his mind, he found himself wondering if some peculiar secret shared by his parents had followed them to the grave.

He was thinking of Andy, to whom he bore such a striking resemblance. And he thought, too, as he sat there surrounded by his early toys, of the countless hours that he had put in, when the other members of the family were in bed,

trying to revive the stricken one's shattered memory. But little had been accomplished.

Dr. Crow had recommended an operation when winter set in. Now winter had come and there was no money. To Eddie it was a discouraging situation.

As for the prowler, following his mysterious appearance in the convention camp, he had been seen no more. Curiously, though, Eddie felt that the strange-acting man was not far off. He was waiting; quietly and cunningly waiting.

But waiting for what?

Drawn to a front window by sounds from the road, the boy gave a cry of surprise when a rickety automobile turned into the farmhouse lane.

"What do you know about that! Here comes old Fostick. I wonder what he wants."

Herman Fostick had made a fortune in the farming community by shrewd buying and selling. At one time he had dealt largely in live stock, buying and shipping, but of late years he had done the most of his speculating in hay, of which he bought and shipped enormous quantities. Now and then he bought a farm, on speculation, though it was generally known throughout the countryside that a farm had to be "dirt cheap" to attract him.

Having parked his mud-splattered automobile close to the east porch, the visitor, after a sweep-

ing comprehensive glance throughout the farmyard, came stoop-shouldered and stiff-legged to the house. Eddie opened the side door.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fostick."

"Um. . . . Your uncle t' home?"

"No, sir. He's in Ashford."

The visitor gave a peculiar start. Eddie wondered at it; and afterwards he remembered it.

"Ashford? What's he doin' over there?" The small bright eyes under their bushy brows, like the spoken words, were sharply questioning.

"I think he went over to the county seat to see about an abstract."

"Um . . ." came bluntly. "Farm bein' advertised fur taxes?"

"No," said Eddie dryly. "Uncle Alex usually manages to get enough money together to pay his bills." There was a sharp cough. "Please step inside so that I can close the door. I've got a bad cold."

"Got any hay?" was the visitor's next concise inquiry.

"I don't think that we have any to spare. But you had better see Uncle Alex."

"When's he comin' home?"

"We expect him this afternoon on the interurban. That is largely why my aunt and cousin drove to town."

"That other boy still stayin' with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"In Ashford."

"With your uncle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ever find out who he is?"

"No, sir."

"Um. . . . Queer case; queer case. . . . I hear your cousin Herb didn't go back to college."

"No, sir. He's going to skip a year."

The visitor grunted.

"A college education is all right fur them as want it—an' kin afford it."

Eddie might justly have resented the insinuating remark. But he kept silent.

"Your uncle doin' pretty good this year?"

"Oh, about the same, I guess."

"Which is nothin' t' brag on, I take it."

Seated by the window, the blunt-speaking visitor let his appraising eyes sweep over the drab hilly farmland. And the negative nod of his head was significant. Then his face underwent a quick change as a locomotive whistled in the cut that gave the farm its north boundary.

"Um. . . . Your uncle got any thought of sellin'?"

Eddie was taken by surprise.

"Selling? Selling what?—the farm?"

"Yep."

The younger one laughed queerly.

"Nobody would buy this farm."

"Um. . . . 'Tain't much of a farm, that's a fact. Hadn't ought t' be worth more'n fifty dollars an acre. I might give forty-five."

"Uncle paid seventy."

"How much land?"

"Forty acres."

" 'Tain't worth a cent more'n eighteen hundred dollars."

Eddie gave the visitor a puzzled look. Familiar with the buyer's methods, he could not doubt that the shrewd native speculator really was desirous of obtaining the farm. That is what had brought him here. If it had been a good farm the boy could have understood the situation. But to want to buy *this* farm of all farms! It was indeed puzzling.

When the other members of the family came home that night they, too, were puzzled over the buyer's offer. But Mr. Garry made little comment. He was naturally a quiet, reserved man. Not infrequently his quietness was caused by worry over his financial circumstances. The farm didn't pay a decent living. To keep his son in college he had been compelled to borrow money at the bank, of which the hay buyer was a director; and it was the lack of money that now kept the third-year student at home.

"Well, Pa," Aunt Hattie inquired that night, when she and her husband were in bed, "did you find out anything about Andy in Ashford?"

"No," the farmer spoke shortly.

"He told Mrs. Barlow that he had been there before."

"I took him all over town. But finally I had to give it up as a bad job. I'm afraid, Ma, that nothing short of an operation will ever restore his memory."

"Oh, dear! I was so in hopes that you'd meet somebody in the street who would recognize him. . . . Did you go to the schoolhouse?"

"Yes. But he was wholly unknown to the principal."

"I was talking with Dr. Crow this afternoon. And he says that Andy will have to be operated on in Chicago. We never can afford it."

"Let's sell out, Ma, and start all over again in some other locality."

"Sell out to Herman Fostick for forty-five dollars an acre!" the woman spoke spiritedly. "Never, as long as I live. You should realize, Pa, that his only object in buying the farm is to sell it to some one else for more than he paid for it. And if he can get more than forty-five dollars an acre for it, why can't we?"

There was a short silence.

"Say, Ma, I've been intending to caution you about talking too freely about Andy's affairs."

"What do you mean?" the words were spoken somewhat tartly.

"Well, when that agent was here the other

day it struck me that you told him more about Andy's business than was necessary."

"What agent?"

"The one selling extracts."

"Oh! . . . You mean the 'vanilla' man. Come to think of it he *did* ask me a lot of questions about the boy. Did I talk much, Pa?"

The farmer smiled to himself in the dark.

"You usually talk a-plenty, Ma, if given any encouragement."

Wednesday morning found Eddie back at his desk in the sales department, where he learned, with fine satisfaction, that the first ten days of the month had netted more than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of business. As a result, everybody in the sales department, most of all Mr. Halliday, the acting sales manager, anticipated a clean victory in the big fall drive. September, October and November had lifted the sales curve to a mark of six hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars. That left considerably more than three hundred thousand dollars for the month of December. No one month in the whole history of the company ever had produced such a huge volume of business. But to the sales department employees it now seemed that December was going to run high above the three-hundred-thousand-dollar mark. For the comparative records of the sales manager showed that on an average eighty per cent of the month's total

business was closed after the tenth. So the big part of December's business was yet to come.

"Just the same," laughed Poor Fish one noon, when he and his young desk companion were enthusiastically discussing the situation, "I'll hold my breath till we do hit the million-dollar mark. 'For there's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip,' as the saying is."

"Bu-lieve me," waggled Eddie thoughtfully, "the Eagle Company is getting some hard wallops from us now. Our salesmen are running rings around them."

The expression of Poor Fish's face changed.

"Did I tell you what I heard?"

"What?"

"They're about to go under. Dad and Mr. Salzar were talking about it the other night. We may buy them out."

"Aw! . . . We don't want their old junk."

"All of their patents aren't junk. And if we can buy their business for a song it will give us a clean swing in the sprinkler supervision field, for they're the only real competition we have."

"I wonder what will become of Glazelle," laughed Eddie reflectively.

"And Burgess," Poor Fish appended.

"The dirty crook!" Eddie spoke in quick anger.

"Dad says that business is like athletics: A victory that is won through cheating is no real

victory at all. It doesn't surprise him, he says, that the Eagle Company is about to dissolve. And I get his point. The executive who tries to run a crooked business doesn't get the loyal support of his men. They neither respect him nor trust one another. Using Glazelle and Burgess for spies was one of the most bungling things that the Eagle Company could have done."

Eddie regarded the other with laughing eyes.

"Mr. Philosopher!"

Poor Fish's face grew dreamy.

"When do you suppose we'll get our chance?"

"At selling?"

"Sure thing."

"Oh, in ten or fifteen years," joked Eddie, remembering how long Harley Bagley had been kept in training.

"I tell Dad he's got to put me in the field next year, even if I am under twenty. I know I can deliver."

"You!" cried Eddie, with mock scorn in his voice. "Why, kid, you couldn't sell shamrocks to Irish millionaires."

"No?" came genially.

The smart-acting one strutted around.

"If you want to feast your eyes on a real salesman, take a look at yours truly."

"So you young cubs are anxious to do some real selling, eh?"

Eddie and Poor Fish looked foolish when they

saw the acting sales manager standing behind them.

"You caught us that time, Mr. Halliday."

The capable leader saw where the over-confidence of the ambitious boys might easily lead to their discontentment, and he wondered, in the quick turn of his mind, if a good way to "cure" them wouldn't be to turn them loose in the field under conditions that promised little hope of success.

"For several years," he began, jumping into a plan, "we have been trying to sell a paging system to the Atlas Brick Company of Ashford. They need the service. But Mr. Grump, the manager, is hard-boiled when it comes to buying. I was told yesterday that they are getting ready to put up a new building, so this may be the opportune time for us to approach them with our proposition. My selling kit is at your disposal. Now, if you boys are sincere in wanting to do some actual selling, and thus win your spurs, as the saying is, here is your chance."

The boys were struck dumb. And at sight of their blank faces the scheming manager was forced to turn aside to conceal a smile. He could readily comprehend how successful they would be in talking "Electro-Call" to the churlish brick-factory manager. He had tried it himself and had been forced to admit that it was a hopeless job. Nor did the brick company's present in-

tended scheme of expansion change the aspect of the situation. For, as Halliday well knew, the contemplated new building was nothing more than a two-hundred-dollar garage that the manager was erecting for his own selfish convenience.

Not until the sales manager had passed on did the boys fully recover their poise.

"Who was he talking to?" laughed Poor Fish.

"Both of us, I guess."

There was another jerky laugh.

"Do you suppose he meant it?"

"Of course, he did."

"The Atlas Brick Company! I remember the plant. It's a branch of the Atlas Sand and Gravel Company, a ten-million-dollar corporation."

"What are we going to do?—go over together?"

Poor Fish regarded his chum quizzically.

"Do you really want to go over?"

"I'm not crazy about it, if you must know the truth," Eddie confessed, completely lacking in enthusiasm. "But the chief has sort of called our bluff. So now it's up to us to put up or shut up."

"Suppose we flip a penny. Heads I go and tails you go."

The tossed coin fell to the floor.

"Tails," laughed Poor Fish. "Congratulations, old pal of my cradle days. The luck is all yours."

Eddie grinned in an effort to appear game.

"You'll be proud of me, kid, when I come home with a three-hundred-dollar order."

"You'll probably get two orders," laughed Poor Fish. "One to get out and the other to stay out."

CHAPTER XVII

FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

THE ride to Ashford from Sun Prairie was a short one, as the two towns were only ten miles apart, and making good connections, after leaving the factory, Eddie soon found himself in the busy county seat.

In his boyish dreams he had anticipated this proud moment—had gloriously pictured himself swinging along to the lair of the "P. B." (prospective buyer) with his trusty selling kit under his arm, to later effectively submerge the helpless prospect with his glib flow of scientific salesmanship. It had seemed so easy in his fancy—and, to a point of victory, so exciting. Now he wondered, in a boyish mood, if he would have sense enough even to find the prospect's factory.

Suddenly he received a friendly slap on the back.

"Hello, Eddie Garry. How's the state of your health this drear December afternoon?"

Earlier in the year, in the summer months, two young men had camped for a few days on the Garry farm, close to the railroad track, and now

Eddie found himself looking into the grinning face of one of these supposed vacationists.

"Hello, Mr. Thurston. I didn't expect to find you here."

"The company sent me here on an engineering job."

Eddie thought he understood.

"Yes, I heard that the brick company is branching out."

"It isn't the brick company," corrected Thurston, "it's a brand new job. How's everything on the farm?"

"Lovely."

"Your aunt and uncle well?"

The boy nodded.

"What's this?" inquired the man, curiously touching the fat brief case.

"I'm a salesman now."

"A salesman, eh? Well, well! What are you selling?—left-handed monkey wrenches?"

"I feel like a left-handed monkey wrench," confessed the untrained young road man, with a broad grin. Then he told his story.

Thurston laughed.

"What! Did you have the nerve to begin your selling career on Friday the thirteenth?"

Eddie gave a sudden gasp.

"Friday the thirteenth!" he cried.

"Didn't you know this was the thirteenth?"

"*Good* night! Show me a nice soft spot so that I can faint in comfort."

"Maybe, though," the man smiled, "this will prove a lucky day for you. I hope so. If you're in town this evening look me up at the hotel and we'll have supper together. I'll be interested to learn how you come out."

Friday the thirteenth! The hundreds of black cats that had crossed the pathway of his growing years had given Eddie no concern, but now he acknowledged to a sudden annoying nervousness. And the nearer he got to the plant of the Atlas Brick Company the worse he felt.

There were two people in the small detached office, a thin-chested woman whose unattractive face suggested a soured disposition toward the world in general, and a stoop-shouldered, furtive-eyed bookkeeper of middle age.

"Well?" the woman injected hostility into the word.

Eddie gulped.

"Is the manager in?"

"Mr. Grump is busy in the factory."

Friday the thirteenth! The young salesman saw three calendars on the office walls. Each one seemed to shriek the unlucky date. And suddenly the situation struck the boy's sense of humor.

"Is Mr. Grump superstitious?" he grinned.

"Superstitious? What do you mean?"

"I came over from Sun Prairie to sell him an Electro-Call paging system. And I just wondered if he'll insist on me dating the order the fourteenth."

Here a greasy workman slouched into the office with a pipe wrench in his gloved hand.

"Where's Grump?" he grunted.

"Out in the factory."

"Tell him I gotta shut off the water in the sprinkler system. For one of the heads is leakin' in the boiler room."

The young visitor was all attention now. So they had a sprinkler system here! Wouldn't it be the gravy, he told himself in boyish slang, if he could sell the brick company a sprinkler supervisory system as well as a paging system. Hot doggety!

The better part of an hour elapsed before the manager came heavily and importantly into the office. There had been several telephone calls, the girl informed the newcomer. Eddie overheard the conversation that ensued. He was almost breathless now. For the very thing had happened that he had hoped would happen—the woman had forgotten to deliver the plumber's message!

Here the big-bodied, churlish manager discovered the young visitor.

"Well," he boomed, scowling, "what do *you* want?"

Eddie almost jumped out of his shoes at the thunderclap. And all the fine arguments that he had been building up in his head were scattered to the winds. None of this escaped the hard-faced manager. A man of bulldoggish business tactics, always eager to humiliate a salesman, he had no intention of wasting any time on this stripling. And as soon as he found out what the stammering visitor wanted, he made short work of backing the inexperienced young road man out of the door, after which, as a mild hint, he kicked the door shut with such savage violence as almost to snap its hinges. Literally shoved into the street, Eddie dizzily wondered if he hadn't better run to save his life.

And this was selling! Cold as the day was, the aspiring young salesman wiped huge drops of perspiration from his forehead. Then his temper asserted itself.

"The old bully!" he cried, scowling back at the dingy office. "He might at least have been halfway civil to me. Huh! The only way you could sell that bird a paging system, or any other kind of a system, would be to crack him on the head with a baseball bat and get his signature to the order while he was groggy."

The day had begun with a leaden sky, so characteristic of December weather in that section, and now there was a flurry of snowflakes in the air. The wind had risen, too. And the unsuc-

cessful young salesman unconsciously buttoned his warm overcoat tighter about his throat as he hurried dispiritedly to the interurban waiting room.

Here he learned that a car had jumped the track between Ashford and Sun Prairie, temporarily holding up the traffic. There had been no injuries as a result of the accident, but it was generally felt that the line wouldn't be opened short of midnight.

So the stranded young salesman went in search of his friend, Mr. Thurston. And at the hotel he learned that the Atlas Sand and Gravel Company, for whom the young engineer worked, was planning to further extend operations to Ashford County, which explained the engineer's presence in that locality. A mammoth gravel pit was to be opened as soon as spring came, and already iron girders and other supplies for building purposes had been shipped in by the carload.

"It's a big thing for Ashford," informed the talkative hotel clerk. "We expect at least five hundred new families in town. As a result, real estate has taken a big jump. Three-hundred-dollar lots on the west side are being held at three thousand dollars. I'm speculating in real estate myself. Are you going to be in town over night?"

"I hardly think so. But I may be here till midnight."

"Then you better drop in at the chamber of commerce this evening. For Mr. Ringlow, the general manager of the corporation, is here. We got him to come down from Chicago to give us a talk."

At four-thirty the engineer, for whom Eddie was waiting, came into the hotel lobby, accompanied by a taller, bigger-framed man, wrapped to his ears in a fur-lined overcoat of costly texture.

"Any telegrams?" came the crisp inquiry.

"Nothing as yet, Mr. Ringlow," the desk clerk politely informed.

"Please get me a connection with our Chicago office. I'll be in my room."

The engineer had gotten an eye on his young friend.

"Well, Eddie, how did you come out at the brickyard?" he inquired good-naturedly.

"Nothin' doin'," was the chagrined admission.

"Couldn't get around the hoodoo, hey? Well, that's too bad."

The boy's eyes grew eager.

"What's this I hear about your company building a big gravel plant out west of town?" he questioned.

"A half-million-dollar job. Harrison started with me on the engineering. But I'm going it alone now. My maiden effort, so to speak."

"Harrison?" repeated the farm boy, thinking. "Wasn't that the name of the man who camped with you at our place?"

The engineer nodded. And then, for no apparent reason, he appeared embarrassed. However, Eddie gave this little thought. He had something of vaster importance on his mind.

"Didn't you tell me, Mr. Thurston, that you have an Eagle fire-alarm system in your big Brookfield plant?"

"Sure thing."

"Then you'll be putting a fire-alarm system in this new plant, won't you?"

"I'm specifying it in my drawings."

"Has the system been ordered?"

"Not yet."

The boy trembled with eagerness. He had lost a three-hundred-dollar deal; but here was a chance to land a two-thousand-dollar job! Small wonder that he was excited.

"Could I see your blueprints, Mr. Thurston? I'd like to talk with you about an Electro-Call system for your new plant. We're putting out better stuff than the Eagle Company. And think of the fine service we can give you, with our factory only ten miles away."

The engineer laughed. Yet there was a warm look in his eyes as he regarded the flushed boy.

"You're talking to the wrong man, Eddie. I have nothing to do with the buying."

"Is Mr. Ringlow the right man to see?"

"I should imagine so—on a proposition like this. But I doubt if you'll be able to get very close to him. For this is a big deal. And he—well," the man decided to speak plainly, "he might naturally think that you were a bit young."

A train had come in from the east. And now a taxicab swung up to the hotel with a single passenger. Eddie saw the man alight and pay the driver. It seemed to the boy that there was something peculiarly familiar about the newcomer's broad back. Then the man wheeled and came into the hotel.

It was Glazelle, the sales manager of the Eagle Electric Company!

CHAPTER XVIII

EDDIE LEARNS STARTLING FACTS

EDDIE'S actions excited the engineer's curiosity.

"Some friend of yours?" he inquired genially, letting his eyes follow the big-bodied man who had bustled into the hotel.

"I know him," Eddie said quickly, in a tense, nervous voice. "But he isn't a friend of mine. Far from it. Can we get out of the room, Mr. Thurston? I'd rather he didn't see me just at the present time."

A few moments later the man and boy were closeted in the engineer's room on an upper floor. And then Eddie quickly told the story of Glazelle's earlier betrayal of the Sun Prairie company.

"He's a crook, Mr. Thurston. And if it's his scheme, in coming here, to talk you into buying an Eagle fire-alarm system for your new plant, you had best have nothing to do with him."

The engineer was thoughtful.

"Now that I recall, Mr. Ringlow did say something this afternoon about a conference on fire-

alarm service. Evidently he had arranged to meet the other salesman here."

Eddie was trying hard to fight down his nervousness and keep a cool head. For he realized that he had a tremendously big job ahead of him. In matching wits with the unprincipled competitor, he had the disadvantage of being an inexperienced boy. Yet, with his youthful confidence in men, he clung to the belief that he would stand a chance of getting the big order if he could show the experienced corporation manager that he knew his business.

What was it Halliday had said in their first meeting? Oh, yes—*know your line.* The young beginner had taken this advice to heart. For he had felt that the successful manager was qualified to give advice. And now the younger one, face to face with his first real selling problem, was infinitely thankful that he had given such close, absorbing attention to his work, both in the factory and office. He felt at the moment that he did know his line. And this gave him confidence.

But could he present his proposition in a businesslike way? Could he talk to the big executive without an attack of self-consciousness and subsequent nervousness? He must, he told himself grimly. For unless he did he would fail.

Hotel walls are not always soundproof. And now the ringing of the telephone in an adjoining room lifted the boy out of his groping thoughts.

"Yes, this is Mr. Ringlow speaking," came a deep voice. "What's that? Oh! . . . I beg your pardon—I thought it was a long-distance connection. I'm glad to learn that you are here, Mr. Glazelle. Yes, our engineer has the building plans ready. Suppose you come up to my room in about twenty minutes."

With things moving so rapidly, Eddie had another attack of nervousness. But he doggedly fought it down.

"Mr. Thurston, may I ask a very great favor of you?"

The engineer turned inquiringly.

"I would like to have you introduce me to Mr. Ringlow, or, in some way, fix it so that I can talk with him right away. I'm afraid to wait. For if I have to face Glazelle, in competition, I have the scared feeling that I won't be able to say a word."

The man's hand went to the younger one's shoulder.

"Eddie, let me tell you something."

"Yes, sir."

"It doesn't make a particle of difference to me what kind of a fire-alarm system we have in our new plant—so long as we have a system that functions. I can use an Eagle system. Yet, as your friend—and please understand, Eddie, that I am your friend, and have a warm interest in you—I'd like to see you get the order. As a

matter of fact I think you are entitled to the order. No, don't ask me what I mean—I can't tell you now. Later on you'll understand. Business is a sharp game. And sometimes the 'under dog' doesn't get a square deal. Later on you may feel hostile toward me, for something I have done, but try and remember that I was acting for my company and not for myself. Personally, I am your sincere friend, as I say, and I want to help you. And the least I can do is to get a satisfactory interview for you. Are you ready to talk to the chief now?"

Eddie could justly have let himself become mystified, even troubled, by the engineer's strange words. But he didn't. As a matter of fact he seemed to comprehend only the man's closing inquiry, to which he replied with an affirmative nod.

"Try not to think about yourself," came the sensible advice. "You look all right and talk all right. So think about your product. Let that be the only big thought in your mind. Tell Mr. Ringlow what you know about your system. He will be interested in the points you have in your design that the other system lacks. And, as you mentioned to me downstairs, stress the point of your factory's convenient location. For, in the purchase of such goods, service is a big factor these days."

Introduced to the general manager, Eddie found himself looking into a pair of inquiring

gray eyes. There was a composed graciousness in the seasoned business man's manner that put the boy at his ease. What a contrast, the young visitor thought, between this kindly executive and the one at the brickyard!

"Garry?" the man repeated, giving the boy a quiet, searching look. "Did you say your name is Garry?"

"Edward Garry, sir."

"I once knew a family by that name. That was a good many years ago. The memory is not a happy one. . . . What was your father's name?"

"Cornish Garry."

A deep silence came over the man.

"Is your father still living?"

"No, sir. He died when I was ten."

"And your mother?"

"She followed my father three years later."

"Do you ever recall the mention, by either of your parents, of a man by the name of Wilbur Ringlow?"

The boy suppressed a slight cry.

"Wilbur Ringlow! Why! . . . There's a photograph in my mother's album of a man by that name."

"And your mother never told you anything about Wilbur Ringlow?"

"No, sir."

The executive then showed by his actions that

he had no desire to let his thoughts wander farther into the subject of his youth and its associations. Drawing himself together, he became once again the capable man of business.

"I believe that Mr. Thurston introduced you as a salesman of the Electro-Call Company. What is it that you wish to see me about?"

"I'm not a regular salesman," Eddie felt constrained to admit, in boyish candor. Then he told how he happened to be in Ashford and how it had come to his ears that the Atlas Sand and Gravel Company was planning to erect a mammoth plant in that locality. Almost before he realized what he was doing he had his brief case open. He was talking now of things that he knew about. And the interested executive listened without a word.

"I don't know whether it's good business to knock your competitor, Mr. Ringlow," was the way in which the inexperienced boy concluded his selling talk, "but I think you ought to know what Glazelle did to us last October." The story was told. "So you can see what kind of a man he is."

The executive smiled. Yet the youthful frankness of the bright-faced eager boy struck a warm chord in his heart.

"I am to conclude then," said he dryly, "that everybody in your organization is strictly on the level?"

"You bet your boots," came the loyal outburst. "When you buy our stuff you get the best stuff on the market; and we stand back of it, too."

"So far as I know the Eagle system that we have in our Brookfield plant is proving satisfactory. And the company certainly has kept its work with us. . . . How do your prices compare with theirs?"

"I can give your our prices, Mr. Ringlow. I can't give you theirs."

"Very well. Suppose you go over our building plans with Mr. Thurston and lay out a complete fire-alarm system. He will help you. Later on Mr. Glazelle will do the same thing. And I'll see then how the prices of the two systems compare."

The young salesman's thoughts took a bold turn.

"Are you going to equip your plant with sprinkler service, Mr. Ringlow?"

"Of course. Our insurance scheme requires it, as you may know."

"Then you probably will be interested in our new sprinkler supervisory service, which will make your sprinkler system one hundred per cent efficient. Here's the idea: You have a sprinkler system in your plant. It's your constant protection in case of fire. But suppose that some careless workman closes a main valve to make some necessary repairs in the line and then forgets to

turn the water on again. See the danger? Now, here is what our new service does: Every time a main valve is closed *you* know about it, for an electric tape recorder in your office prints the number of the closed valve and the exact minute the water was shut off. Further, two red 'danger' lights stare at you from the wall of your private office, a constant reminder that your sprinkler system is inoperative. If these red lights continue to burn, you probably will make it your business to find out why the repairs are dragging along. And should you find the repairs completed, and no water in the system, it's safe to say that some one in authority is going to get a calling down. With an Electro-Call sprinkler supervisory system you know at all times whether or not there is water in your sprinkler lines. And insurance companies——"

"This is all very interesting," the executive cut in, with a trace of impatience in his voice, "but I do not feel the need of such a system, for I have yet to hear of a fire gaining serious headway in a sprinkled plant because of dry pipes. I rather think that you are magnifying the need of such apparatus. If there was any great service given by them they would be in more general use."

Having made such excellent progress with the executive on the fire-alarm situation, Eddie felt that it would be unwise to engage in an argument. So he closed his brief case, and having politely

expressed his thanks for the satisfactory interview, he withdrew from the room.

"Well," grinned Thurston, upon the entrance of his young friend, "did you get an order?"

Eddie's face was aglow.

"I'm to lay out a system from your drawings and quote prices."

"Better cut your prices down."

"I have no authority to do that."

"Glazelle will cut his prices if he knows you're on the job. So if I were you I would call up your sales manager. You can use my telephone if you want to. And you ought to get a quick connection."

But the young salesman didn't accept the use of the telephone. For one thing he didn't want to be overheard in the adjoining room—that, he felt, would be most unbusinesslike. Then, too, he knew how strictly his company adhered to its policy of one price to all.

The afternoon had settled into drab darkness, with a sharpened wind. And standing at the window, with the cheerless lighted business street below him, the engineer called attention to the increasing snow.

"Regular Santa Claus weather," he cried. "No chance for you to get home to-night, Eddie. So you had better figure on staying here with me. I've got a good wide bed. And it will be a big treat to me to have you with me."

At supper time the two went down to the dining room together. Glazelle wasn't in sight. Was he upstairs in the manager's room? Eddie wondered. And for an instant he was tempted to go quietly to the engineer's room and listen. Then he flushed with shame. He never would do a sneaking trick like that, he told himself. For good business was clean business.

Supper over, he got a connection in the lobby with Sun Prairie.

"Hello," Herb's voice came over the wire.

"This is Eddie speaking. Say, Herb, I'm going to stay in Ashford all night."

"Got a heavy date, huh?" came laughingly.

"Yah, with a fire-alarm customer. I may get a two-thousand-dollar order. Rap on wood, kid."

"*You* get a two-thousand-dollar order! You're goofy."

"Is it storming over there?"

"*Is* it? Ma's scared to death that the house will collapse and ruin her cellarful of canned fruit. She broke a mirror this morning. And on Friday the thirteenth, too! Can you imagine! She wouldn't let me shave for fear the razor would skid and cut my throat. And when Mr. Fostick came out this afternoon to get an option on the farm, and asked her to sign his paper, she almost fainted. Sign a legal paper on Friday the thirteenth! It was unthinkable. I thought I'd die to hear the argument. And now

the two of them are sitting up watching the clock. For Fostick wouldn't leave without an option; and she wouldn't sign till midnight."

Eddie found it hard to define his feelings as he left the telephone booth. So the farm was going to be sold! He wasn't sorry. Yet, in a way, he felt that a very definite and important chapter in his boyhood was being closed forever. There was a touch of sadness in the thought. Would his uncle buy another farm in the vicinity of Sun Prairie? He wondered.

Having gone alone to the engineer's room to complete his layout of the proposed fire-alarm system, he again overheard the manager telephoning in the adjoining room.

"Hello! Chicago? Oh! . . . That you, Bailey? I've been trying to get you for the past two hours. Say, what's the name of that Sun Prairie man who's taking up those farm options for us? What's that? Fossel? What? Oh! . . . Fostick. I remember now. No, I haven't seen anything of him. Wasn't it your understanding that he was to be here to-day? What's that? You had a letter from him. Yes, I can hear you. He's trying to get an option on the last farm, eh?—yes, the one adjoining the railroad, where our engineers camped when they made the still survey. I understand. Don't you think I ought to go over to Sun Prairie to-morrow and hurry things along? What? Well, just

as you say. To-night, at a business men's meeting, I had planned to briefly mention the fact that soon we hoped to extend our operations to Sun Prairie, but I shan't say anything about that now. It wouldn't be wise. Say, Bailey, I've been talking with a couple of fire-alarm salesmen this afternoon. Have you any preference between the Eagle and Electro-Call systems? We have an Eagle system in our Brookfield plant. What's that? Well, well! I thought it was working all right. Then we ought to give the Electro-Call people the order, don't you think? What's that? No, I haven't seen their prices yet. Very well. Good-by, Bailey."

Eddie had arisen to his feet. And the papers that he had been working on, which completed his layout, had fallen unnoticed to the floor. Gravel! Sand! He saw now why the crafty Sun Prairie buyer was so eager to get possession of the gravelly farm. Everything was clear to him—even the engineer's mysterious words.

At the moment a nauseating sickness overcame the emotional boy. And there was a hurt, beaten look in his young eyes. Business to him had been a wonderful dream castle. He had gloried in the vastness of it—in its forcefulness and strength and fairness. Of honest practices and manly ideals himself, he had felt that only such fine qualities governed business. And now . . .

Thurston, who on company orders, had se-

cretly probed the farm's rich gravel deposits while camping there, had said: "Business is a shrewd game. And sometimes the 'under dog' doesn't get a square deal."

The "under dog!" At the moment all of the family loyalty in Eddie's honest heart swelled to the surface. The million-dollar corporation had marked his uncle for the "under dog." Land that was worth a fortune to them, with its convenient railroad outlet, they were trying to buy, through a tricky agent, for a handful of silver.

Well, they wouldn't succeed!

Learning that the telephone wires were down between the county seat and the near-by town, Eddie got into his cap and overcoat and ran through the storm to the nearest garage.

"I want to hire a car to drive me to Sun Prairie," he panted.

"What!" exclaimed the garage man. "Drive through the country in this storm? You're crazy."

"I've got to get home to-night, storm or no storm."

"I don't believe we can make it. But I tell you what I'll do: If you'll pay me twenty dollars I'll take you as far as we can go. Or, if we manage to get through, I'm to get thirty dollars. Is it a deal?"

CHAPTER XIX

CHANGED FORTUNES

EDDIE never forgot that wild ride over the storm-swept prairie. At times it seemed that the sturdy car never would be able to plow through the drifts. But the driver knew his business. It came ten o'clock; then ten-thirty. The farm was now less than a mile away. And the car still was forging ahead.

Then, in due time, the lighted farmhouse itself came into sight.

"Why, Eddie Garry!" cried Aunt Hattie in amazement, upon the wintery entrance of her nephew and his half-frozen companion. "Where in the world did you come from? The very idea! —gallivanting around the country in a storm like this, and you still sniffling. I should take a stick to you."

"Something happened in Ashford, Aunt Hattie. I had to come home. Where's Uncle Alex?"

"In bed."

"Herb said Mr. Fostick was here."

"Sh-h-h-h! He's asleep on the lounge in the next room."

A hard look came into the boy's face.

"Let him sleep! And you go to bed, too, Aunt Hattie, as you should."

"But I promised to sit up till midnight and sign Mr. Fostick's paper."

"The old crook!" Eddie's eyes blazed. "He's trying to cheat us. The Atlas Sand and Gravel Company wants our farm. I found out about it in Ashford. Oh, it was a lucky thing for us that to-day is Friday the thirteenth! For if you had signed that option . . ." There was a short silence. "What did he offer you for the farm, Aunt Hattie?"

"Sixty dollars an acre."

"Sixty dollars an acre!" the words were repeated scornfully. "Do you know what we're going to get? *A thousand dollars an acre!* That's our price. The Gravel Company tried to skin us. And now they've got to meet our terms. The 'under dog,' huh? We'll show 'em who the 'under dog' is."

Eddie could have used the drifted roads as an excuse to stay at home the following morning, but instead he went to work as usual. His immediate office associates joked him about the "order" that he had failed to get at the brickyard, but he paid little attention to their banter. Nor did he mention the big deal that he had lost. That troubled him more than he was willing to confess. He could think of a dozen things that

he should have done, instead of running away like a dazed youth. An experienced salesman would have handled the situation much differently.

Late in the afternoon Herb called up on the telephone.

"Well, Eddie, the deal is closed."

"And how did you come out?"

"Mr. Ringlow offered us two hundred dollars an acre to start with, then jumped this to five hundred when he saw that we were holding out for a thousand. Finally we compromised on seven hundred an acre. Oh, boy! Twenty-eight thousand dollars! We can both go to college now. And Andy can go to Chicago."

This was good news. And by rights Eddie should have been enthused. But he wasn't. He kept thinking dully of what his company had lost.

The buzzer near his desk summoned him to the sales manager's private office.

"I have a letter from the Atlas Sand and Gravel Company. Did you call on them yesterday when you were in Ashford?"

Thus addressed, the young sales clerk moistened his lips. He would be discharged, of course. He had no right to expect anything different. True, he was planning to quit and go to college, so, in a way, the loss of his job wasn't important. But it grieved him to be disgraced in the eyes of the man he admired above all other men.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Halliday," he faltered. "I would have gotten the order if I had used my head. But all I could think of was my own interests."

"But, Eddie, the order is here! A combination fire-alarm and sprinkler supervisory system. I should imagine that it will run as high as eight thousand dollars. My boy, I'm proud of you. This is amazingly fine work for one of your years. A regular commission man would have earned a check for two thousand dollars on the deal. You, of course, are not a commission man. Still, Mr. Salzar has asked me to hand you this. We both feel you have earned it. Put it in the bank and let it work for you."

Eddie stared at the slip of paper. A check for five hundred dollars!

"There must be some mistake," he cried, struggling to grope his way into the daylight. "Mr. Ringlow told me he wasn't interested in our sprinkler supervisory service. And after me exposing him——"

"I should have explained that they had a quite serious fire at the Atlas Brick Company's plant last night. It seems that the sprinkler pipes were *dry*. That is what influenced the general manager to include the sprinkler supervisory service in his order. Now, it ought to be an easy matter for us to sell a supervisory system to their other big plant in Miller's territory. I'll get in

touch with him immediately. As for Mr. Grump——"

Eddie had fought down his dizziness. There was much in the happy situation that he didn't understand, but that gave him no immediate concern. The old boyish grin had returned to his face.

"Mr. Halliday, I'm going to quit the first of next month and go to college, for our farm has been sold and we have plenty of money. I'll tell you the whole story some day. But before I go I want to bring in an order with Mr. Grump's name signed to it. Will you give me that chance?"

The sales manager smiled. For he understood the situation perfectly.

"Go to it, my boy. And good luck."

A special-delivery letter awaited Eddie at his desk.

"One of the things I try to do in business," Mr. Ringlow wrote intimately in long hand, "is to maintain an open mind, with no unfair or unreasonable prejudices, and I am convinced now, after our fire in the brickyard, that such equipment as you described to me yesterday is added protection. Furthermore, I am told that our Eagle system is not standing up. So, entirely forgetful of personalities, I take pleasure in giving your firm the order.

"Regarding our purchase of your uncle's farm, I may say, in defense of our secret survey, that it seems to be the ambition of every property owner to 'hold up' a wealthy corporation. So we protect ourselves accordingly. In your uncle's case, through exposure of our contemplated operations, we have had to pay seven hundred dollars an acre for land that he would have sold to any of his neighbors for less than one hundred dollars. Is that fair to us? True, the land, with its rich gravel deposits, is worth a great deal more than one hundred dollars an acre to us; but please remember that it is our peculiar facilities for developing the land that builds up its higher-than-soil value.

"Our agent in Sun Prairie had been instructed to pay your uncle two hundred dollars an acre for his farm, which we thought was a fair price. Why Mr. Fostick offered only sixty dollars an acre we can't understand. It may have been stupidity; we would hesitate to openly accuse him of trickery.

"As you grow older in the ways of business you probably will learn the importance of being graceful in defeat as well as effervescent in victory. Had I not learned to practice that early in manhood I would have been an embittered soul, for I suffered fair defeat at your father's hands in rivalry over your mother. Now, in a

way, I have suffered defeat at the hands of my successful rival's son. But that is all in the game! I accept this defeat with a smile.

"Our business settled, I had quite an interesting chat with your uncle, who informed me that you are going to college. Fine! I shall follow your career with warm interest. Possibly we may find a way of spending our vacations together. In memory of your mother, I would like to grow closer to you as you grow older."

Eddie showed this letter to his uncle and aunt. And that night he put it away with his other boyish treasures. A grin spread over his face as he touched a small tin bug; then he reminiscently fingered a fragment of dried pumpkin. Business, after all, was a wonderful game. For every man who cheated, like Glazelle, there were a hundred who played fair. And it was the men who played fair who earned the sweetest victories.

Halliday had said in fun: "Some day, Eddie, you may be my right-hand man." And now as the happy boy sat dreaming of what lay in probability beyond his college years, those two words kept running through his head.

"Some day. . . . Some day . . ."

CHAPTER XX

AMAZING DEVELOPMENTS

THERE was fun in the farmhouse a few evenings later on during the time that Eddie was shaving and otherwise scrupulously preparing himself for his "date." For Herb Garry was a tease.

"Um. . . . Be sure you shave close, Eddie."

"Aw, shut up," the lathered one continued his delicate operations.

"Have any trouble finding 'em?"

"Beat it."

"I've got a magnifying glass upstairs."

"Keep it."

"Want to wear my pink shirt?"

"No."

"Laura loves pink."

"Your nose'll be pink if you don't shut up."

"Listen, Eddie: I'm older than you are, and more experienced. So it'll pay you to take my advice."

"I don't need your advice."

And thus the two cousins continued to talk back and forth, Aunt Hattie smiling to herself as she listened from an adjoining room. Then how

great was the pride in the kindly woman's heart when the beloved nephew came downstairs in his new suit.

"Oh, Eddie! You look *so* nice. And I'm *so* proud of you. Look, Pa. Eddie has his new suit on."

His fortunes having changed, the beaten, discouraged look had vanished from Alexander Garry's eyes. And now a trace of humor lurked in their depths.

"Are you going back to the office, Eddie?" came the sly inquiry.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Herb. "That's a good one. If you must know the truth, Dad, our Eddie-boy—are you sure you washed your ears, Eddie?—has a heavy date with the dearest, the sweetest, the most bewitching, the most divine——"

Bang! went the door. But Herb quickly jerked it open.

"Remember," he called after his retreating cousin, "half of that new Baby Lincoln is mine. So don't get funny and run it up a telephone pole." Then: "Oh, Eddie! Wait a minute."

"What do you want?"

"Don't forget to buy her a box of candy. Then, if your modesty overcomes you and you lose your speech, you can feed her gumdrops."

Eddie enjoyed every moment of his ride to town. Boy, he told himself over and over again,

as he caressed the steering wheel with his gloved hands, this was *some* car. And to think that he owned it in partnership with his cousin. What luck! And what added luck that Laura Salzar had given him a "date." Gee! His first real date! He wondered boyishly if he'd know how to act. Maybe, was his thought, he should have earnestly sought Herb's advice. For the other boy, of course, being older, had had dozens of dates. Still, Herb would have teased the life out of him.

Laura Salzar met her young caller at the door.

"Why, Eddie," she spoke vivaciously, looking over the country boy's shoulder, "I didn't know that you had a new car."

There was pride in Eddie's eyes as he glanced back at the shiny new motor car now parked in the snow-banked driveway.

"Herb and I own it together," he explained. "Uncle Alex bought it for us this afternoon."

Having separated himself from his heavy overcoat, the bashful caller was led into the large living room, with its cheerful open fire.

"You remember Eddie Garry, Mother," Laura addressed a tall, white-haired lady, who arose and graciously extended her hand to the timid youth.

"Yes, indeed," smiled Mrs. Salzar. "I'm very glad to see you again, Eddie. Was it cold driving in?"

"Eddie has a new enclosed car, Mother," the girl spoke ahead of the visitor.

"Oh! . . . How nice. One hardly minds getting around in the cold in an enclosed car."

"Is it true," Laura inquired of her caller, when the two were alone in front of the fire, "that you and Herb are going away to college next month?"

Eddie earnestly recounted the extraordinary facts associated with the sale of his uncle's barren farm.

"And what of the boy who is staying with you?" Laura further inquired. "Is he going to college, too?"

"No," Eddie shook his head. Then, actuated by some strange impulse, he inquired: "Did Andy ever remind you of somebody you know?"

"Ye-es. I've often thought he resembled you."

"I—I haven't told Aunt Hattie or Uncle Alex, but I'm convinced that Andy is a close relative of mine. That is what brought him here. He came to see me. And then, as you know, the ghost struck him down."

"Has the ghost ever disclosed his identity?"

"No."

Here a familiar impish face appeared in the doorway giving into the front hall.

"Hi," greeted Poor Fish, who felt quite as free here as in his own home across the street. "Thought maybe I could get you to go to the

picture show with me," he addressed the girl, thus explaining his informal call. "See you're busy, though." The eyes were roguish. "Having a good time, Country Jake?"

Laura laughed.

"Take off your coat and join us," was her warm invitation. "As soon as the fire burns down to a bed of coals we're going to pop corn."

"Two's company and three's a crowd," quoted Poor Fish, posing in the doorway. "Your dad at home?"

"He and Dr. Crow are in the study playing chess."

"I have a note for him."

"How is your father?" Laura inquired, suspecting who the message was from.

"Getting along fine. Expects to be back at his desk by the first of April. He really wanted to go back this month, but Mother insists on taking him to Florida. So don't be surprised if I drop in here some day with my trunk."

"You poor neglected child! And will I have to perform the sisterly act of darning your socks?"

"Well, I think you should—and kiss me goodnight, too, if Eddie won't get jealous."

"Silly."

"He's like one of the family," Laura spoke to her caller, when the other boy had gone, his merry whistle dying in the street.

"He's a good kid," Eddie spoke feelingly. "I think a heap of him."

"He, too, should be in college," Laura spoke sensibly. "And he might go back, Eddie, if you coaxed him."

"Wouldn't that be hot!—the three of us together!"

"Try and persuade him, Eddie. His father will forever feel grateful to you if you do."

Later Laura inquired:

"When does your uncle have to vacate the farm?"

"The first of April."

"Is he going to buy another farm near here?"

"He hasn't decided yet. Aunt Hattie talks some of moving to Lafayette."

"Is that where you and Herb are going to college?"

"Yes; at Purdue."

Here the girl arose to answer the telephone, later interrupting the chess game in an adjoining room.

"The call is for you, Dr. Crow."

Eddie nodded to the portly physician as the latter bustled across the room.

"Humph!" grunted the professional man, at the conclusion of the brief telephone conversation. "Can you imagine any one calling me up to inquire what to do for ingrown toenails?"

Laura laughed.

"We all regard you as a fountain of information, doctor."

"How's Andy?" the physician then inquired of the young caller.

"Just about the same," Eddie informed.

"Hasn't recovered his memory?"

"No, sir."

"A queer case," the physician meditated. "Somehow I've had the hope that everything would come back to him with a rush. A counteracting shock, so to speak. That *has* happened. . . . Have you given any further thought to an operation?"

"Uncle Alex is going to take him to Chicago next month."

"Um. . . . I wish we could give the boy a scare. Startle him somehow. There's that telephone again! Do you suppose it's Mrs. Mowser still seeking information about her ingrown toenails?"

Then:

"Yes, this is Dr. Crow. What's that?" the speaker's interest quickened. "Oh, yes. Yes, Mrs. Garry. Yes."

Mrs. Garry! Eddie's heart stood still.

"Is it Aunt Hattie?" he cried, springing to his feet.

Dr. Crow put down the telephone, a great happiness showing in his kindly eyes.

"I have some good news for you, Eddie.

Andy has completely regained his memory. His name, your excited aunt tells me—and she wants me to come out there right away—is Andrew Blake. He and his mother, who is with him, together with two other friends, George Warman and Rodney Chadwick, tell a strange story."

Mr. Salzar appeared in the doorway.

"An important call, doctor?"

"Yes," the word was spoken briskly, as the physician got into his huge fur coat.

"It's the boy at Eddie's house," Laura explained to her parent. "His mother is with him. And the shock of meeting her has brought back his memory."

Eddie, too, hurried into his overcoat, his heart beating with peculiar excitement.

So Andy and his mother had a strange story to tell! The farm boy rightly felt that the "story," whatever it was, concerned him. And one can understand his eagerness to get home.

"Come again, Eddie," Mr. and Mrs. Salzar invited graciously.

"Yes," appended Laura, with dancing eyes, "come again when you can stay longer."

And Eddie, walking on air, had the distinctly lover-like feeling that he'd like to take root at the fair one's feet and stay there forever!

CHAPTER XXI

CONCLUSION

It was a happy, excited group that gathered around the cheery heating stove in the farmhouse that Alexander Garry and his wife, both bent from long years of hard toil, were soon to vacate. At the wintery appearance of Eddie and the physician there had been an affectionate meeting between the two cousins, for such they proved to be. Then had followed a series of general introductions.

"My story will reflect no credit on me," Mrs. Blake told the others, "yet I feel that you should know the circumstances leading up to Andy's mysterious appearance here.

"I was, I am sorry to confess, always foolishly jealous of my husband, who frequently absented himself from home for days at a time. I accused him of taking up with other women. Last June I received a letter from an old neighbor, who had moved to Weston, Ohio. I was told that this neighbor had seen a wedding photograph of my husband and another woman. Beside myself with shame over what I thought was my dead husband's disgrace—for I suspected him of

bigamy—I went to Manton, arriving there late in the evening. Knowing the location of Andy's room, having been there, I went up the fire escape, telling him my story, begging him to go to Weston and learn the full extent of his father's shame, while I, in turn, hurried on to Canada, my girlhood home, where I planned to isolate myself. It all seems very silly and unnecessary to me now—my actions and all. But at the time, as I say, I was beside myself."

"And I, in turn, was stunned," Andy picked up the story. "Could it be, I asked myself, that my father—*my own father!*—was a bigamist? Well, was my concluding thought, it wouldn't take me long to learn the truth. I would go to Weston, get the facts, and then return to close up my affairs in Manton. I went to Rodney's house to say good-by to him; and through an open window I overheard him say to his father: 'I wish that Andy had a father like you.' I hurried away then. I couldn't face him. For there was that possibility that *my* father was a criminal. . . . Mother and I took the train east; she went on to Canada, where Rodney searched for her in vain; and I left the train at Weston. But there I met with obstacles, for the family who owned the album in which the incriminating picture had been seen had moved away, leaving no address. I finally learned, though, through the neighbors, that the album, instead of belonging to

Mr. and Mrs. Brantingham, really belonged to an orphan boy by the name of Eddie Garry. Younger than me, I was told that he lived with his uncle and aunt near Sun Prairie, Indiana. I came here; I peeped in the darkened window, getting against the freshly-painted sill; and I thus learned that Eddie Garry and I were as alike in appearance as twins. Later in the evening, firmly convinced of my father's shame, I walked to Ashford, where I spent the balance of the night, which explains why the town looked familiar to me. Making my plans (I wanted to meet Eddie and quiz him), and disguising myself so that our resemblance to each other would not be noticed, I later arranged to board here, pretending that I was a botanist. And the rest you know."

"I became alarmed," Mrs. Blake continued the story, "when I received no word from Andy. And finally I came home, where I learned of his disappearance. Detectives, hired by his employers, were working on the case. And finally, after long, anxious weeks, one of these men traced him here."

"Laws-a-me!" cried Aunt Hattie, when told that her "vanilla" man was a private detective.

"The detective reported to me," George Warman then picked up the story, "and I, in turn, got in touch with Rodney and Andy's mother. It was Rodney's suggestion that we drive here in his car, and here we are."

It remained for Mr. Garry to supply the missing pieces in the picture puzzle.

"Beyond a doubt," he told Andy, "your father was my missing younger brother, Eddie's father's twin, who, after a family quarrel, disappeared many years ago. We thought he had died at sea."

It was learned later on that the Sun Prairie hay buyer, unprincipled miser that he was, had schemed to buy the Garry farm for sixty dollars an acre, then resell the land to the Sand and Gravel Company for two hundred dollars an acre. But his exposure ruined him. Not only did the indignant farmers refuse to do business with him thereafter, but the bank in which he was a director (by virtue of his heavy deposits) tactfully conveyed the official information to him that his resignation would be gratefully accepted.

Then other things came to light. And the farmers wondered as these stories were passed from ear to ear. Nor was anybody in the community greatly surprised when the object of these stories finally ended up in the county insane asylum.

The miserable ending of a miserable life. Thrift is man's blessing; greed is his curse. And every process of Herman Fostick's mind had been shaped in terms of greed.

A "ghost" costume and a pair of huge colored glasses, found among the demented one's effects,

proved conclusively who the "ghost" was. And this was the story that chiefly startled the countryside. *Why* the chicken thief had employed the unusual disguise; why he had picked up Andy's glasses, after felling the watcher; and why he had followed Eddie to the convention camp, will never be known. Nor was Andy ever able to recall where he had met Corbin Burgess. But that is unimportant.

And here we will leave Andy Blake for the present, his mind fully restored and his heart at rest. Needless to say he went back to Manton, where he enthusiastically resumed his successful advertising work. He and Eddie now exchange letters weekly—and the latter still eagerly looks forward to the time when he will bring in Grump's order for an Electro-Call paging system.

Well, we'll see about that. Certainly, Eddie has all of the natural qualities of a successful salesman.

Which brings us to the close of our story. But others, of like plot, featuring Andy Blake and his friends, will follow. *"Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold!"* That is the title of the next book of this series.

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THE END

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